

On excellent forme

Sebastian Carter

B. H. NEWDIGATE
Book Production Notes: Articles contributed to "The London Mercury" 1920-1925
207pp. Tabard Private Press, White Timbers, Stokesh Heath Road, Oxshott, Surrey KT22 0PS. £48.
1 869924 002
TOM COLVERSON and DENNIS HALL
A Catalogue of Fine Press Printers in the British Isles
48pp. Inky Parrot Press, Design Department, Oxford Polytechnic, Headington, Oxford OX3 0BP. Paperback, £9.50.
0948415 096

Among the writers who bore witness to the renaissance in the book arts in the early part of this century, B. H. Newdigate was unusual in addressing not a specialist audience through articles in professional journals, but the general literate public. At the invitation of Sir John Squire, he contributed book production notes to the monthly *London Mercury* for almost the whole of its publishing life, from the

end of the First World War to the beginning of the Second, and made many readers aware of the qualities of design and printing in the fine books that were appearing from both the private presses and commercial publishers.

Bernard Newdigate was one of the first generation of the typographical revival, being born in 1869, and so four years younger than Frederic W. Goudy and twenty years older than Stanley Morison. He had a Jesuit training at Stonyhurst, before being cajoled into printing at the Arden Press, in which his father, a Catholic convert, had an interest. After the First World War, Newdigate joined with Basil Blackwell in taking over the Shakespeare Head Press, an admirable partnership in which Blackwell took the financial burden off his shoulders and left him free to do what he did well, the editing and design of the classics. His most enduring monument is probably his one-volume edition of Shakespeare (1935).

About the same time as he started work at the Shakespeare Head Press, he began writing for the *Mercury*. His book production notes, which continued with scarcely a break until 1937, were a running commentary on what was new and valuable at the typographically con-

servative end of the book world, covering such things as the Monotype recuttings of historic types, the work of the Nonesuch Press and Bruce Rogers, the books of the Golden Cockerel, Gregynog and many other private presses, as well as what was going on in the rest of Europe. Newdigate wrote in a clear, if not particularly lively, style, and his short essays both stimulated many of his readers at the time, and remain for us as a valuable month-by-month record of how a man of wide culture and practical experience saw what was happening during this wonderfully productive period.

Philip Kerrigan, whose labour of love at the Tabard Private Press this edition of *Book Production Notes* is, has chosen to present Newdigate unabridged, and has so far been able to reprint only the first five years' worth (with a foreword by Ruari McLean). Great pains have been taken with the text and illustrations, and many of the examples of types have been reset rather than reproduced. We must wait for a later collection to read the essays on such important events as the later Monotype revivals, Times New Roman and the Oxford Lectern Bible.

Although Newdigate was by no means as

narrow-minded as he is sometimes portrayed, and in the early 1920s was predicting a bright future for offset lithography and linotype, he was always particularly kind to the work of private presses. He would have been pleased that his adoptive city of Oxford played host last November to around eighty present-day fine presses, who met at Oxford Polytechnic to show their wares, exchange ideas and hear several of the more successful printers from the area explain how they operate. The organizers, Tom Colverson and Dennis Hall, claim that this was the largest such gathering and display of books that there has been in Britain, and their well-illustrated *Catalogue of Fine Press Printers in the British Isles*, which includes references to another hundred presses who could not be present, is a useful survey of a craft which seems to be flourishing against all the odds.

The *Katalog der Ornamentstichsammlung der Staatlichen Kunstbibliothek Berlin* (a collection destroyed in the Second World War), compiled principally by Arthur Lotz and published in 1936-9, has been reprinted by H & S Publishers, Utrecht (two volumes, 782pp. H371).

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Cover picture: Katalin Arkai's photograph "A Day in the Life of Brixton", July 1986.

Labour under illusions

Peter Clarke

KENNETH O. MORGAN
Labour People: Leaders and lieutenants, Hardie to Kinnock
370pp, Oxford University Press. £12.95.
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In an unpropitious hour, a work as distinguished as Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* "fell dead-born from the Press", as its author ruefully acknowledged. It is to be hoped that Kenneth Morgan's new book, *Labour People*, which likewise deserves a better fate, is not temporarily cheated of its due by the vicissitudes of current politics. Its celebration of the progress of "this great movement of ours" culminates in an appraisal of Neil Kinnock which could opportunely have been appropriated as a campaign biography. Written, it seems, in the aftermath of the Fulham by-election, with Labour promising to breast 40 per cent in the opinion polls and to blow away the froth of the Alliance for good and all, it invites the happy prospect of "the Kinnocks at No 10, throwing a rugby ball around the lawn where Lloyd George's garden suburb once took root". The author must have known full well that such passages were hostages to fortune, and not only because of his dictum that "dons are notoriously bad judges of popular politics". His supposition that Labour had touched rock bottom in 1983, with nowhere to go but up, was not unreasonable. Only in the aftermath of Greenwich has Labour shown signs of boring down into the rock itself.

Such transitory fluctuations in public opinion are clearly a fragile basis for confident extrapolation, while what matters is the underlying historical trend. Morgan's is a favourable view of Kinnock, a man with "not only a courage but also a wisdom which the combined gifts of Attlee, Gaitskell, Wilson, Callaghan and

Foot had failed to generate in the past". This judgement may be put down partly to national pride in the man from Tredegar - "like his countryman, Henry VII, what he minds he compasses" - but it is more fundamentally a product of a vividly perceived vision of the Labour movement and of its centrality to the development of modern British politics. As a working historian, Morgan is now uniquely qualified to write about it in its successive phases, from the age of Lloyd George, in which it made its decisive initial impact, to the Attlee Government, which saw Labour in power, before looking to its ultimate apotheosis when "not only Kinnock himself, but also the rhetoric and practice of the movement will truly have come of age, eighty-seven years on". We are offered a perspective on twentieth-century British politics which is implicitly shared by James Callaghan's memoirs but sharply challenged, in different ways, by the historical studies from John Campbell and Bentley Brinkerhoff Gilbert.

Morgan has produced some two dozen well-rounded biographical essays, unencumbered by footnotes but buttressed at every turn by an authoritative if tacit scholarship. Here is Keir Hardie, demythologized but not debunked, ceding pride of place in the years of Labour's rise to Arthur Henderson, "the most effective and creative of all its founding fathers". Henderson's sheer pedestrianism, it is implied, made him "a safe custodian for the movement as flashier colleagues fell by the wayside; he built to last". Paced with defections among the leadership and electoral disaster in 1931, this was the hidden strength on which Labour relied for recovery. By 1945, indeed, the party had scaled the commanding heights of the constitution. There are serviceable essays on Dalton, Attlee, Bevin and Morrison which put the findings of recent biographies sensibly into context.

If Labour's unquestioned years of achievement in the 1940s receive their due, so does the more problematic period of subsequent decline, dating from the schismatic crisis of 1951. "In many ways Labour has never recovered", Morgan remarks in a subdued moment. The clash between Aneurin Bevan and Hugh Gaitskell is analysed in essays on each of them, and the suggestion advanced that "it is hard to acquit Attlee, Morrison, and Gaitskell of charges of conspiracy to remove Bevan from the government". This view of Gaitskell can hardly be sympathetic: "what many felt he was not, and never should have been, was a leader

presentative figure - the flower of the working class in person - is a central theme in Campbell's *Nye Bevan and the Mirage of British Socialism*. It explains at once why he built his career around the achievement of socialism through the Labour movement, and why, in the author's provocative claim, "his life must be written down finally as a failure". The "mirage" was what led him on, yet, by the time of his death in 1960, "the idea for which he had lived had failed utterly to win the adherence of the class it was supposed to benefit".

This is a book of real distinction, harnessing a personally sympathetic account of Bevan's career to an astringent analysis of its political significance. As a historical study it supersedes Michael Foot's noble biography without the least offence but without the least doubt. Foot's Bevan was an immensely attractive, iconoclastic figure, standing in a long and bookish tradition of British radicalism, with a Marxist turn of phrase to be sure, but essentially a great parliamentarian and above all the untrammeled voice of the back benches - Nye through the looking-glass, in short. Campbell's Bevan is a much more faithful product of his environment, not just the South Wales coalfield and the miners' union, but also the Central Labour College where his Marxism was imbibed. The class struggle and public ownership were to remain the fundamental tenets of his political doctrine, and his pursuit of power was deadly serious.

The point is illustrated by Bevan's response to the 1944 White Paper which pledged the wartime coalition government to maintain full employment. Bevan called it "an impracticable proposition. Indeed, I will go so far as to say that if the implications of the White Paper are sound, there is no longer any justification for this Party existing at all." The essential role of the Labour Party - the task for which it had been called into being by the proletariat - was to reorganize the economic basis of society in the interests of all (since the bourgeoisie could hardly be expected to participate in this process). "Nobody believes in public ownership for its own sake", Bevan claimed. "This party did not come into existence demanding Socialism, demanding the State ownership of property, simply because there was some special merit in it." It was the only means of escaping the necessary evils of capitalism and of achieving prosperity for all. "If private enterprise can deliver all these goods, there will not be any argument for Socialism and no reason for it."

As long as Bevan held to this analysis, he

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was a potent threat to capitalists, like Lord Beaverbrook, whose champagne he had no compunction in appropriating as a first instalment of the social revolution. The "Bollinger Bolshevik" had so much sparkle because he was buoyed up by the wave of the future. In 1945 both he and the class he represented had their golden opportunity. For Bevan, Labour's electoral victory meant a sudden leap into the Cabinet, and as Minister of Health and Housing he became one of the outstanding successes of the Attlee Government. For the working class he later reserved a more jaundiced verdict: "History gave them their chance - and they didn't take it."

It is on this verdict that Campbell's study really hinges. Where did it all go wrong? Bevan himself proved that he could deliver the goods. No one could have been more imaginative, more adroit or more attentive in creating the National Health Service, virtually from scratch, with little more to go on than a manifesto promise and an approving aside in the Beveridge Report. Campbell reinforces a familiar theme here; but he also strongly endorses Bevan's record on housing, which has often received unfair disparagement, especially by comparison with his Conservative successor, Macmillan is remembered for building 300,000 houses a year in the 1950s, at a time when shortage of materials no longer held back construction. His formula of big talk plus small houses was a political winner. Campbell concludes that Bevan "succeeded, against great odds, in building 800,000 excellent council houses", but that he was wrong in believing "that he was thereby helping to build for Britain a socialist future". It took Bevan to build council houses to standards of which owner-occupiers could be proud - and it took Thatcher to invert his logic by selling them off.

As Bevan recognized, the trouble was that Labour was trying to change a society moulded by a capitalist psychology. "We know that unless the workers can divest themselves of that psychology, we shall fail", he said in 1949. By then he was betraying new anxieties about the course of politics, and in April 1951 his ministerial career came to an acrimonious end. On this episode at least, Campbell's account follows in the footsteps of Morgan's earlier work, whose scholarly achievement it had been to rescue Bevan from the charge of gross inconsistency. Thus Morgan writes bluntly of "the false claims spread by Attlee, Dalton, Gaitskell, Shinwell, Gordon Walker, and others that Bevan's opposition to the defence programme, rather than just to the health charges to help pay for it, was a huge surprise, sprung from out of the blue upon unsuspecting colleagues". His bull point has been to cite the official records showing that Bevan's disquiet about the rearmament programme was voiced in the Cabinet as early as August 1950.

This revision is important in our understanding of the crisis, but if it is accepted, a further puzzle arises: not just why the "false claims" should have been so widely perpetrated, but why they should have gained such widespread credence. And why did Bevanites like Harold Wilson, Richard Crossman and John Freeman also endorse the view that it was on the health service charges that their hero, all too vulnerably, staked his reputation? For that matter, Callaghan now adds weight to this version. What a lot of Labour people to have got it wrong! The reason is surely that there is a difference between Bevan, on the one hand, registering persistent doubts about the defence

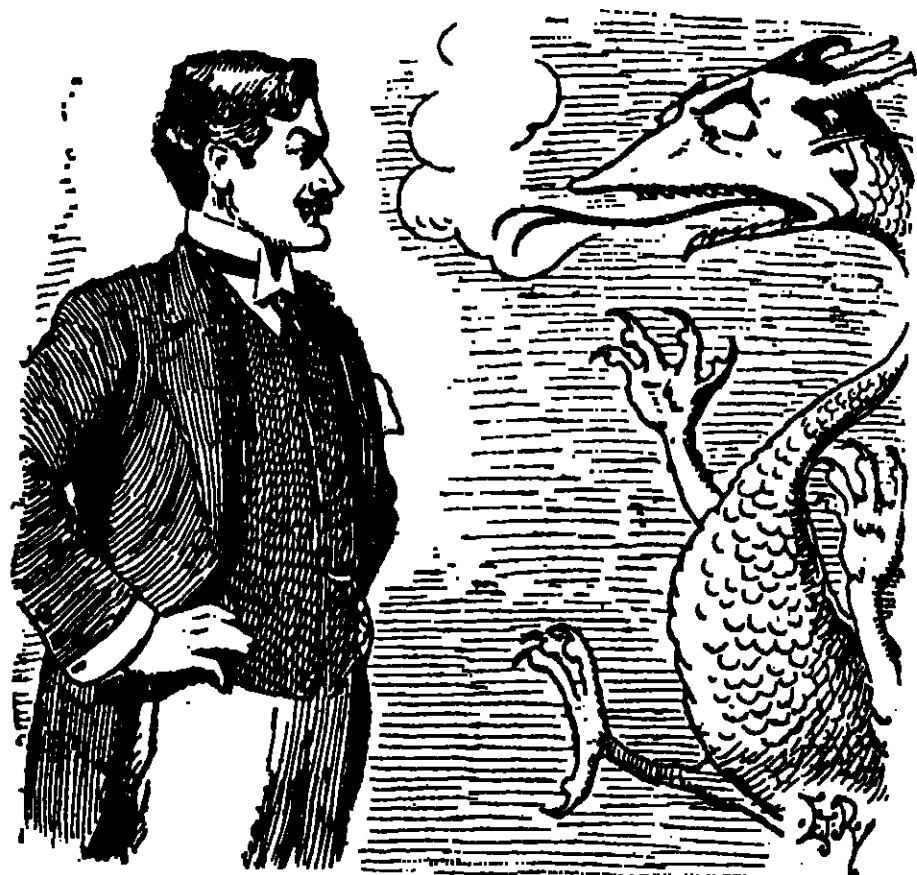
programme (a point now irrefutably documented) and, on the other, taking his stand upon this ground. The point of issue, when the chips were down, was Gaitskell's insistence that the Health Service should find £23 million in cuts, chiefly from charges on spectacles and false teeth. Such a sum was only the loose change in a Budget of £4,000 million. It was completely dwarfed by a total defence programme of £4,700 million, spread over three years, which was the ostensible beneficiary of such sacrifices. Yet the argument in fact turned on this trivial sum. The question Bevan posed was: "Aren't I worth £23 millions?" Everyone saw that if only this concession were made to him, the crisis could be resolved: Bevan would stay and so would the great armaments.

There was, in short, a good economic case against the rearmament programme, one which Bevan intuitively grasped more quickly than the professional economist Gaitskell, and for which he has always deserved more credit than Churchill's subsequent admission that Bevan "happened to be right". The professional politician Bevan, conversely, made one political blunder after another in handling his case, and in particular failed to make rearmament the issue. The fact that historians can still argue about this, thirty-six years later, shows the extent of his failure.

It proved to be the first of many maladroit episodes in which Bevan simultaneously enraged his enemies and baffled his friends. Freed from the discipline of office, he pursued a fitful and disaffected course in opposition to the party leadership. His charismatic force meant that there were plenty of Bevanites, although some of them were driven to distraction by his instability of purpose. But the real flop was the attempt to invent Bevanism. What, after all, did it amount to, beyond a strident call for more nationalization and a hankering after fewer armaments? Bevan's eagerly awaited book, *In Place of Fear* (1952), is treated dismissively by Campbell, who calls it "the wordy last gasp of a dying political tradition, not the herald of its rebirth". Bevanites and Gaitskellites were divided as much by tribal hostility as by ideological incompatibility. Bevan balked at the "fresh thinking" of revisionism but in practice he accepted the mixed economy. With Gaitskell installed as Attlee's successor, Bevan grudgingly deferred to the claims of a leader some eight years his junior. No one could have suspected how short both their lives were to be. (At his death Bevan was still younger than Macmillan had been when he became prime minister.)

By 1957, Bevan was ready to affront his own followers over unilateral nuclear disarmament. He told the Labour Party Conference at Brighton that its proposed resolution would "send a Foreign Secretary, whoever he may be, naked into the conference chamber", and, in an unforgettable thrust, called such a response "an emotional spasm". If this was arguably the end of Bevanism, it is also arguable that Bevan lived just long enough to see the end of Gaitskellism too. Following Labour's third electoral defeat in a row in 1959, Gaitskell was rebuffed in his bid to rewrite Clause Four of the Labour Party constitution, enshrining the necessity of public ownership. Bevan might complain that Labour's election manifesto in 1959 was not socialism, only "pre-1914 Liberalism brought up to date", but that did not mean that Labour had become seriously revisionist or was ready for its own Bad Godesburg conference. Labourism, in short, asserted its impervious might,

itself that, paradoxically, he may exaggerate its failure: if you start out as a missionary, half-saved souls are not good enough. If he had examined the political and economic constraints on government (in particular the 1974-9 Labour administration) more dispassionately he might have come up with a more cheerful interpretation. More disappointingly still, this is a biography without flesh and blood: despite its painstaking accumulation of detail, it does not tell us much about the changing membership, finances or structure of the CPAG. It is almost as unrevealing about its politics as it is about the politics of welfare, and the CPAG remains a story in search of an author to do it justice.



"Li-yl G-rge and the Dragon". The first drawing of Lloyd George in Punch - the dragon is Joseph Chamberlain - appeared in the issue of December 12, 1900. It is reproduced from Bentley Brinkerhoff Gilbert's biography of the statesman, which is reviewed here.

and at the end of their lives both Bevan and Gaitskell made their terms with it.

Campbell's contention is that Bevan was "very much a figure of his time: even in the fifties he was becoming an anachronism, and socialism of his sort today seems extraordinarily dated". Just as he challenges the pious view of both the centrality and the vitality of the Labour Party in shaping the politics of the late twentieth century, so Bentley Gilbert injects a similar note of scepticism about the politics of the early twentieth century. *David Lloyd George: A Political Life* comes from an eminent American historian whose earlier work on the making of social policy showed a mastery of administrative detail. The first volume takes Lloyd George from Llanystumdwy to No 11 Downing Street and sees him inaugurating important welfare legislation, culminating in the National Insurance Act of 1911. Gilbert's theme here is that "the origins of Liberal social reform have nothing to do with the Labour party as such and that the competition, as Lloyd George saw it, came from the right, from the demagogic Unionism of Chamberlain, while the content of his program derived from his own Welsh background".

That background is explored in fine detail in the early chapters - no easy task when so many of the original sources are in Welsh. Gilbert has been able to lean on the work of indigenous scholars while bringing a fresh eye to such phenomena as Welsh nationalism, which "resembles nothing so much as the prairie Populist that boiled up within the United States Democratic party at the same time in the 1890s". He is severe rather than generous in his references to other historians who are periodically reprimanded for falling below his own standards of exact scholarship. The comments on Lloyd George likewise stay well this side of idolatry, for example that he "was essentially a manufacturer's representative marketing a commodity or a process he did not yet possess". His "public orations were an art of complete abstraction, where the medium carried no message", and, with the exception of land reform, "he never had an ideology". Even his opposition to the Boer War, it is held, was not the result of a principled stand for the interests of small nations, as he later claimed. It all adds up to the view that "there is no straight line of inevitability about Lloyd George's career".

Why, then, did Lloyd George champion the New Liberalism of the Edwardian period, with its emphasis on state intervention in social and economic policy? Gilbert sees this as a response to the Tariff Reform initiative of Joseph Chamberlain, who "aimed at nothing less than a revolution in Conservatism, bringing the party of the crown, the land, and the Church, the world of iron, steel, coal and of an

aroused working class". He can point to the way that Chamberlain, challenged by Lloyd George in May 1903 on his previous commitment to old-age pensions, suggested that tariffs might raise the revenue to pay for them. In this statement, Gilbert reiterates, "lay the Chamberlainite challenge to the New Liberalism", causing Lloyd George to see that "Chamberlain's bid for the working man's vote had to be met" - as it was, in due course, by the Liberal's own policies of social reform, financed under Free Trade. There is something in it, but, stated so uncompromisingly, it surely ignores one very awkward fact. For though Chamberlain may have linked tariffs and pensions in May 1903, before the end of June, in response to pressure from Unionist colleagues, he had been induced to unlink them again.

By the time Lloyd George became Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1908, however, the issues had become clearer. If the Liberals were to ignore social reform while in office, Lloyd George had warned, "then would a real cry arise in this land for a new party, and many of us here in this room would join in that cry". The new party, of course, would be Labour, which might then become "a force that will sweep away Liberals amongst other things". The fact that advanced Liberals sometimes talked in this way did not mean that in their bones they believed it would really happen, and Gilbert may well be right to focus attention more sharply on the Liberals' electoral competition with their traditional opponents. When Lloyd George looked to the Old Age Pensions Bill "to stop the electoral rot" in 1908, it was the threat from Unionism not Labour he had in mind.

This was a contest in which the Liberals enjoyed unexpected success. It was the link between pensions and Free Trade, as forged in the Budgets of 1908 and 1909, which served to scotch Tariff Reform by removing part of its rationale. Lloyd George's rhetorical triumph in selling his Budget to the voters in 1909 is brought out well. His subsequent efforts with National Insurance were more of an administrative marvel than a popular triumph. Perhaps that is why in 1910 he explored the possibilities of a coalition with the Unionists to carry such measures. This is a controversial episode in a career which was later tainted with an alleged weakness for Conservative blandishments. Gilbert maintains that the prospective coalition was not an end in itself for Lloyd George, but only a means of implementing domestic reforms - "essentially the existing program of the New Liberalism". Little wonder, then, that the Unionists backed off, with a well-founded suspicion that they were being led by the nose. As it turned out, the Liberals carried National Insurance as a party measure, at the price

major concessions to the commercial insurance companies, who elbowed the friendly societies aside in the administration of the scheme. With National Insurance on the statute book, Gilbert takes leave of Lloyd George, rather abruptly, without fulsome farewells, at the end of a businesslike encounter to which it is to be hoped he will shortly return.

James Callaghan's memoirs show him ineradicably set in a chronic tradition of Labourism: none more deeply rooted than he. He is at once the greatest loyalist and disloyalist in the party. Reared amid desperate poverty, he rose to hold the four greatest offices of state, and his *Times* and *Change* occasionally has the air of an earlier generation of autobiographies by Labour leaders. ("My father had taken me aboard the *Victoria and Albert* when I was a toddler, but I do not suppose it ever crossed his mind that one day his son would be invited to return as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.") Indeed he admits to growing sympathy for veterans like Jack Lawson, the author of *A Man's Life*, a copy of which he later presented to President Carter. "In those early post-war days I was sometimes impatient and critical of these men's unhurried pace", the ex-premier confides. "But looking back, I now know better."

But One covers Callaghan's entry into politics, with his election as MP for Cardiff South in 1945 after a pre-war stint as a union official. There are some unrevealing passages on the Attlee Government, in which he served as a junior minister at Transport and at the Admiralty, and a more engaged account of the 1951 crisis. Callaghan stresses that the support of service ministers like himself for the re-

armament programme was conditional on the availability of adequate American supplies: "In public they professed confidence that the conditions would be satisfied, but that was not the private expectation." Callaghan's subsequent role as Labour's spokesman on Colonial affairs is touched on, but apart from this there is an extraordinary lacuna on Labour politics in opposition in the 1950s and 1960s. One might never have guessed that Callaghan played any role during the era of factionalism, which, perhaps, he would simply prefer to forget.

The book picks up again with his appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1964. There are some candid comments on his reasons for resisting devaluation - "The Conservatives would have crucified us" - a decision which probably did more than anything else to set the constraints under which the Wilson Government laboured. The story that is told here appears to turn on recurrent emergency measures to counter misleading reports in the *Observer* which were forever upsetting sterling. The outcome, when Britain was forced to devalue after all in November 1967, is taken as confirming the original analysis. "The man in the street", the author opines, "felt let down because he had been led to believe that if devaluation took place, it would be a consequence of the Labour Government's incompetence." On this showing, the man in the street may not have been very wide of the mark.

As Home Secretary from 1967 to 1970, Callaghan slowly rebuilt his position, not least within the Labour movement. His opposition to the Government's proposals for trade union

reform, *In Place of Strife*, became widely known, though in retrospect his attitude seems rather ambivalent. On the one hand (or with the back of it), he compliments Barbara Castle for squeezing a commitment for voluntary reform from the TUC through "an exercise in brinkmanship" which was, in this sense, "a brilliant success". On the other hand, he admits that the agreement reached with the TUC proved a dead letter because "the unions failed to take heed" once the threat of legislation was withdrawn. At any rate, the episode cemented Callaghan's own relations with the unions for the time being. Again, these memoirs virtually ignore the fascinating changes within the Labour Party during its time in opposition in the early 1970s, jumping instead to Callaghan's tenure as Foreign Secretary from 1974. This is treated in the manner of a rather banal travelogue, with generalizing asides on "the proud independent spirit of the Greek people", and so forth.

Finally, Callaghan conveys a faithfully mimetic impression of the life of a prime minister, when "the days pass with the speed of an express train and in recollection some periods are little more than a kaleidoscopic blur". Given advance warning of Wilson's impending resignation in 1976, Callaghan adroitly emerged as the candidate least likely to antagonize any major section of the party. He explains that he made a pact with Denis Healey in support of Treasury policies and settled down to winning union support for his Government's anti-inflation policies. He now claims, "I cannot be accused of failing to recognise that an incomes policy is a wasting asset, but I can be faulted for not finding a viable alternative be-

fore its credibility expired." After two years of creditable success, the policy notoriously collapsed during the "winter of discontent" in 1978-9, when the unions set out to break the Government's declared norm for pay settlements of 5 per cent. Where did this crucial figure come from? Callaghan recalls mentioning it at a Cabinet meeting in December 1977, but, "because no formal proposal was before the Cabinet, there was no discussion of my 5 per cent suggestion and Ministers probably assumed I was thinking aloud - as indeed I was". In the Prime Minister's New Year broadcast from Chequers, however, "the 5 per cent idea hardened and popped out when the interviewer tempted me to outline my hopes for the coming year".

Having popped out; it would not pop in again. Indeed, it became the basis of a disastrous confrontation between the Government and the trade unions - "the latest demonstration of a truth we have all uttered to the effect that the fortunes of the unions and the Labour Party cannot be separated". The winter of discontent has become the persistent symbol of the unappealing side of that relationship: a memory constantly refreshed - as synthetically green as the grass in a florist's - by the assiduous attention of Conservative Central Office. Whether it is about to be made glorious summer by this sun of Tredgar remains to be seen. If it is, Kenneth Morgan's *Labour People* will deserve a runaway success as the book which confounded the sceptics in affirming not just Labour's historical ground for self-respect but its unexhausted capacity for self-renewal, from the roots up.

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JSTOR 1516

Magical mud-slinging

Eugen Weber

JUDITH DEVLIN
The Superstitious Mind: French peasants and the supernatural in the 19th century
316pp. Yale University Press. £20.
0 300 03710 4

A countryside where goblins, elves, sprites, fairies and will-o'-the-wisps outnumber peasants; where doctors are less numerous than healers; where there are more miraculous trees, springs, fountains or rocks than churches: this is the picture that Judith Devlin draws of popular religious activity in nineteenth-century France.

In Devlin's France the metaphysical is as anthropomorphic and utilitarian as the physical dimension. Stubbornly Capetian in post-Bourbon times, members of the Trinity and their heavenly cortege turn out as vindictive, mercenary and mercurial as the folk who conceived them. God and his family are agents of an idiosyncratic primitive justice who can be cajoled, bribed, threatened, even punished. Appreciated less for their virtues than their powers, statues, images and relics may be whipped or pelted into action; or cast into dark holes, or wells, or rivers. Saints are morally neutral, like their demonic prototypes, and can be invoked for ends both good and bad. At St Mauvais's fountain, one could pray for the death of rival or foe; three Aves in honour of Notre Dame de la Haine caused enemies to die within the year. Equally practically, a prayer to St Maur speeded the departure of ailing dependants. Nor were the beneficiaries of saintly intervention always human: domestic animals, too, went on pilgrimage, horses to St Ely, pigs to St Antony, kine, oxen, sheep, to trees, lakes, wells and crossroads, or assorted blessings.

Explanations based on sympathetic magic, on correspondences, or on the paucity of medical services and technologies, do not go far enough. Throwing mud at St Laurent to cure eczema, or water at St Amand to get him to make rain, was only tenuously connected with the desired results, and people knew it. Devlin looks on such acts as more expressive than mechanically functional. Saints, in her view (a hard one to gainsay), filled roles that we nowadays assign to doctors, vets, psychiatrists, social workers, matrimonial and insurance agents, who are equally fallible and equally indispensable. They looked after soldiers, travellers, children, folk in distress; protected against thieves, hail, storm, fire, spells, evil spirits or conscription; arranged marriages, cured illness (or sped it to resolution), righted wrongs. At least, that is what they were supposed to do.

Devlin thinks, and this is the novelty of her interpretation, that ritual practices were not so much expected to work (though one might hope they would) as to deliver from anxiety, provide some respite or a relief from pressure. If fairy stories present the impossible as possible, that is not because their audience does not know what's what, but because they are less interested in representing things as they are than as they wish they were and know they never can be. Charms, invocations, visions, prodigies, thrive on unsurmountable misery and need. Popular miracles, like the resurrection of dead babies, so that they can be baptized, mercifully suspend a merciless natural order and offer tiny triumphs over suffering.

As with the saints, so fairies, goblins, elves and their ilk crystallize, then dispel, worry and stress. Their intervention consoles and reassures the vulnerable and deprived, such as orphans afflicted with nasty stepmothers; their shenanigans afford alibis, not just for coming home late, but for feelings that cannot be acknowledged, like dislike of children who could be identified as changelings. Witchcraft provides a social theory of misfortune, the opportunity to ascribe one's troubles to the malvolence of others, but also an instrument of justice in the hands of the weak.

Possession and exceptional cures introduce excitement in a monotonous existence, offer prestige to humble participants, or furnish an opportunity to express feelings of stress, anxiety or rebellion. The more difficult ordinary life is, says Devlin, the more readily people

flock to shrines, the more avidly they pursue the miraculous transformation of a dreary reality. Like Flora Finch in *Little Dorrit*, these people seek not ecstasy but comfort; spells, visions and magic provide uncertain charms to navigate the shoals and rapids of a precarious life.

Just how supernatural did the supernatural appear to those who invoked it? Not very, says Devlin, for whom it was mostly assimilated to the natural order and harnessed to its needs. This plausible view is strengthened by the important role of priests as magicians – often “white” magicians – finding money or averting storms, but also redoubtable, and often devastating. Devlin does not make enough of priests’ traditional magic roles, nor of the coincidence between the religious revival of the Restoration and the prosperity of magic practices; let alone of the inspiration that magic draws from “science”. But she confirms what I have long suspected: that the supposed confrontation between common sense and magic was actually a clash between different kinds of common sense.

Devlin's writing is often prosy, and sometimes humourless. She has a way of bringing up names of people she hasn't introduced, of treating fictional characters (like Tiennon Bertin) as if they were real, and of belittling credible evidence as exceptional. Much as I like it, her system of explanation, focused almost exclusively on the lower orders, is too limiting. After all, many of the phenomena she describes can also be found in the higher reaches of society; nor is it clear quite how variations of misery and stress affect popular religion.

But Devlin's material is fascinating, and one's interest seldom flags. The interpretative infirmity that troubles me is unavoidable in works that tackle overdetermined phenomena with a single explanation. But if the author's interpretation makes for reductionism, it also adds a working hypothesis to the existing arsenal of reductionist interpretations. So the book is welcome because it breaks new ground. No one who has read Devlin can rest content with Burke's view of superstition as the religion of feeble minds. Superstition is, quite simply, a belief we do not share. To say that answers no questions; but it raises enough questions for a bushel of books.

Brain-garden

Each morning the abandoned causes wait,
the leached-out groundnut farm,
the orange-rusted lime-works on the bay,
the crab-farm's empty sea-tanks . . .
I leave them there and walk into the surf,
strike out unburiedly for the reef,
the sand-bar with its coral rubbish,
the palms serenely ruffled overhead.
I'm making up my own brain-garden there,
with old brain corals, big as dinner-plates,
heavy as masonry, grey, lolling, dumb.
Each time I come I add a few
to make it look like more than happenstance:
a cairn of absent thoughts.

Later the boys curl outboard from the beach
and barter Sprites from their old Freezinhot.
They seem to like my spiral
and my tumulus, they can't say why;
the crinkled, quartz mazes of the brains.
Often I ride back in the leaking boat:
the time has flown, I don't quite like to stay
until the air cools and shadows lengthen; besides,
salty and hungry, I have other things in mind.

Tony Judt

ALAIN CORBIN
The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French social imagination
307pp. Leamington Spa: Berg. £18.
0 907 582 47 8

Alain Corbin is one of France's most prolific and interesting contemporary historians. In 1975 he published a two-volume study of social and political change in the Limousin during the nineteenth century. Three years later came *Les Filles de noce*, a history of attitudes towards prostitution in modern France, and in 1982 there appeared *Le Miasme et la jonquille*, of which *The Foul and the Fragrant* is a very faithful translation. Although all his work has been characterized by copious research and wide learning, his style and interests have moved a long way from the early regional monograph. In this book he attempts nothing less than a modern history of smell, smell as metaphor, smell as social indicator, smell and the sense of smell as a guide to and account of social attitudes and their transformation in nineteenth-century France. It is an original and suggestive piece of writing – but also reflects much of what is amiss in historical writing in France today.

Corbin's theme is that a growing refinement in olfactory sensibilities in the years 1750–1880, a lowering of the threshold of tolerance for odours both public and private, ran in tandem with changes in attitudes to public and private health, to new ideas about air, space and disease. He wants to suggest that changing sensibilities in these matters both reflected new social divisions and helped to provide a language in which to describe and justify them. Through a history of how people responded to smells good and bad we are offered a new view of the emergence of bourgeois sentiments and moral evaluations.

The book abounds with interesting observations. Corbin is especially effective in showing how pre-Pasteurian scientific nostrums could, however mistakenly, provide the social and intellectual context for the adoption of medical and social rules deriving their legitimacy *post facto* from the new discoveries of chemistry. It was error, whether over the content of “bad

air” or the significance of bodily secretions, which fuelled the emerging search for “space”, whether between dwellings, within public and private dwellings, or between individuals, and Corbin illustrates copiously the fascinating theories that could be added to define a preference for floral over animal perfumes, or the disinfection and exposure over dissimulation and the closed environment. He is good, too, at relating French doubts over the moral and medical efficacy of disposing of sewage to the belated arrival of mains drainage in the major cities; or on the confusions between perfumery and pharmacy (and the resulting boom in flower sales in mid-century France, with flower girls in evidence all over Paris in the decades of the July Monarchy and Second Empire).

Why, then, should one cavil at Corbin's occasional excesses – his assertion, for example, that these years saw a move from a code of good manners intended to avoid embarrassment to one aimed at narcissistic satisfaction through hygiene (he has clearly never spent much time in southern England, where the move might be thought as yet incomplete)? Surely, a cavalier attitude to dating and a preference for suggestion over argument are not too high a price to pay for insights on everything from the changing nature of sexual appeal to the French aversion to full-length bathtubs (another appeal, this, to English precocity in personal cleanliness, from which it presumably follows that British showers are a faithful reflection of the decline of imperial power)?

The problem, however, is that history is a discipline that can rest exclusively on the power of suggestion. Yet nowhere does Corbin ever construct an argument, a reason for believing that his examples and conclusions bear any relation to one another. He does not even try to make such a case. The text is full of phrases like “this is an exciting idea”, or “this an intriguing thought”. But after a while these asides cease to stimulate and begin to annoy. Why should we believe the linkage he posits between changing olfactory sensibilities and the rise of the bourgeoisie, with its search for control of the “smelly classes”, when the dating, for example, is so woolly? In one case the word “now”, a historical present intended to illustrate a moment of shifting perceptions, is used on the same page to refer to both 1815 and 1861. Corbin's sources for the “pre-olfactory revolution” date variously from 1740 to 1830, while the only real turning-point in these matters, the crisis brought on by the 1832 cholera epidemic, is mentioned but not given its full historical significance.

Moreover, suggestion frequently declines into shoddy reasoning. Just because there is an interesting metaphorical overlap between utilitarianism (which Corbin mis-defines) and the desire to conserve manure, it does not follow that enthusiasm for Benthamite nostrums accounts for the municipal refusal to install mains drainage. That sort of argument demands all kinds of evidence and reasoning of the kind he eschews; instead of argument we are offered hints and nudges, many of them parasitic on either Foucault or the bizarre Lacanian study by Dominique Laporte, *Flatoire de la merde*. “Ah yes,” we say, “I see.” But this agreeable sense of shared insight is treacherous. Corbin gives his fellow historians a warm glow of familiarity with science and deconstructive insight, he flatters them with hints of the Proustian arts (compliments duly repaid on the dust cover with reviewers' allusions to all manner of literary and sensual associations to which the book apparently alerted them). Yet even his literary allusions mislead. Céline and Henry Miller are hardly reliable witnesses to the metaphorical centrality of coprophilia in social revolt, and no, that is not what Matzerath was doing under his grandmother's skirts in *The Tin Drum*.

How did we get to this from the elegant reasoning of Corbin's Limousin study (all which its author now pours unwarranted scorn for its indifference to discourse)? It is hard not to point the finger at the *Annales*, for all that Corbin is not a frequent contributor to that journal, whose influence has been immense and continues still. Only a community of historians so well attuned to a cavalier uninterest in dates, narratives and close reasoning would so readily suspend its disbelief in this astonishing history by him.

Literary lives: the illusive . . .

Peter Kemp

VICTORIA GLENDINNING
Rebecca West: A life
288pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £14.95.
0 297 79084 6

The problem with writing a life of Rebecca West is that she wrote so many of them herself. Not content with producing autobiographical fiction, she also fabricated fictitious autobiography – memoirs meant to mislead, doctored reminiscences, self-centred and self-judging screeds which twist facts into flattering fables. As Victoria Glendinning points out, “the drafted and redrafted the raw material of her life until she was on her deathbed”. Partly, this was to reassure herself; partly, to solicit the support of posterity. She devoted, her son Anthony acidly observed, “a great deal of time and no inconsiderable part of her creative energy to building a dossier that would win her a good posthumous press”.

By a harshly sardonic nemesis, it's her son Anthony – temperamentally resembling his mother, his father H. G. Wells noted – who has done most to sabotage this scheme. Remarking in his *H. G. Wells: Aspects of a life* that “like George Sand before her, she thought of her life history as something that could easily be improved by editing”, he has specialized in caustic commentary on his mother's versions of events: cutting out her habit of confining people and incidents from widely differing times and places into some episode gratifying to her self-image, underlining with relish farcical blunders like her claim that her mother (died in 1921) had chortled with derision at Wells's *The Secret Places of the Heart* (published in 1922).

Besides peeling apart his mother's palimpsests of fact and fiction, Anthony West worked her into a fiction of his own: *Heritage*, a novel in which she figures as Naomi Savage (the surname an allusion to the hate-crazed parent of the eighteenth-century poet who strove to get her son hanged). A moodily unstable and self-ish actress – first seen playing Cleopatra – Naomi postures on and off-stage. Personalities are donned like costumes: marrying – for money and position – a vacuous county gent, she opportunistically assumes a new name, Emily, and a court, upper-crust Shires persona to go with it.

Featuring with uncomfortable prominence in tales told by writers close to home wasn't a new experience for Rebecca West. The early phase of her affair with Wells, in which they gamely frolicked under the pet-names of Panther and Jaguar, was put on show in his *The Research: Magnificent* where, as Amanda – nicknamed Leopard – she is given covert warnings by her mate Cheetaah that he doesn't intend to be permanently penned in with her. *The Secret Places of the Heart*, written when the relationship was in its last throes, portrays her as the carbonized artist, Martin Leeds, spurned by the Wells-figure in favour of devotion to the world's fuel problem. *The World of William Clissold*, published after they had parted, gives her a double drubbing: her younger self is caricatured as Clara, a self-dramatizing and sex-obsessed hysteric; from a woman-dominated background; her later personality is scathingly reviewed in the shape of Helen, an egotistical actress.

These experiences – and her own penchant for populating her fiction with friends and foes (even in her first novel, *The Return of the Soldier*, young “Bert Wells” moves into view, rowing on the Thames) – kept Rebecca ever alert. Victoria Glendinning reveals, to spotting herself in other people's pages. *Phinneas Wake*, she believed, brimmed with unkind references to her and her taste for hats. Charman in Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori* – who resembles Rebecca in having a domineering mother called Lettice, an unfaithful husband and a writer-son who resents her – was, perhaps with cause, seen as another portrait. In addition, it seems, she saw herself distortedly reflected in Wyndham Lewis's *The Roaring Queen*, Hugh Walpole's *The Young Enchanted*, Storm Jameson's *A Cup of Tea for Mr Thorhill* and the Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane*. *The Secret Places of the Heart*, she claimed, had “in every book, some sentences

which have actually been spoken by me at some critical moment of my life, and her books are haunted by Anthony in all his manifestations”.

Given this inflamed streak of bibliomania and her own taste for unrelenting literary vendettas – even in her eighties, Glendinning observes, she was using her position as reviewer for the *Sunday Telegraph* “to settle a few old scores” – it's unsurprising to learn that she devoted anxious thought to who should write her life-story. Characteristic of her suspicion and self-esteem was her decision to designate two biographers: one to produce a full-length study, the other a shorter work. Stanley Olson is assembling the larger tome. Victoria Glendinning was selected for the shorter one, now published.

Choosing her wasn't perhaps Rebecca West's canniest decision. True, Mrs Glendinning



where in her work – especially in her habit of confusing paradox with perversity or dubbing some witless assertion with metaphor in an attempt to smarten it up. Joyce “pushes his pen about noisily and aimlessly as if it were a carpet-sweeper”; “Ibsen cried out for ideas for the same reason that men call out for water, because he had not got any”.

The tone of such ersatz epigrams is that of the adolescent show-off: callowly clever and over-confidently contrary. And in a sense, this book discloses, Rebecca West remained fixated in this phase for life. “She grew up in the focus of her mother's and sisters' attention and she had become habituated”, Wells thought, “to their approval and moral support. She needed it even when she defied it.” This late-teenage pattern of response – enjoying shocking others from a privileged position – was something she never broke free of. Reflecting the formative importance of her early family life, her autobiographical novel sequence, begun with *The Fountain Overflows* and intended, she said, as a “Saga of the Century”, can't stop contemplating it. The lengthy first book covers just a brief span of her girlhood. By the end of *Cousin Rosamund*, the third volume in the series, Rose and Mary Aubrey – versions of Rebecca and her sister Winnie – are, though now mature women, still living like adolescents, obsessed by their youthful years and constantly harking back to them. Similarly, it seems, the as-yet-unpublished memoirs Rebecca wrote in later life endlessly returned to and re-worked her childhood background.

As Rebecca worked on her next novel, *The Judge*, deep-rooted differences between her and Wells emerged on the literary level as well

vey of the life, interspersed with appreciative but rarely very penetrating glances at the literature. While as much of Rebecca West's story as can be extricated from her falsifications is unravelled, her personality and the factors forming it receive scrutiny of a more benevolent kind than she herself generally trained on her fellow-creatures.

What rapidly becomes apparent is that West's character was diagnosed most acutely by two men always very much to the fore in her herd of *bêtes noires*: H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett. When he first met her, Wells recalls in his autobiography, he found her “a curious mixture of maturity and infantilism”. Bennett, in a review headed “My Brilliant but Bewildering ‘Niece’”, noted that “she must, at all costs, ‘perform’. She must be odd”; often this results, he remarked, in “mere irresponsible silliness”. Evidence to back this up stands out every-

where in her work – especially in her habit of confusing paradox with perversity or dubbing some witless assertion with metaphor in an attempt to smarten it up. Joyce “pushes his pen about noisily and aimlessly as if it were a carpet-sweeper”; “Ibsen cried out for ideas for the same reason that men call out for water, because he had not got any”.

Not surprisingly, these paternal vagaries kindled in Cissie a fiery commitment to feminism. This first showed itself when she was fourteen and living with the family in genteel reduced circumstances in Edinburgh, from where she dispatched a letter to the *Scotsman* decrying “the subjection of women” and “sex degradation”. After three years at RADA had convinced her that she wasn't suited to an actress's life – as Victoria Glendinning indicates, she was, with her facial twitch and psychosomatic rashes, too physiologically histrionic to be professionally theatrical – she began her journalistic career writing for the *Free woman*, an organ of the suffragette campaign, and later the *Clarion*, with its socialist rallying calls.

These early articles – vigorously opinionated, courageously outspoken, often fierce and funny in their stinging, whiplash attacks on Establishment pomposity, complacency or hypocrisy – are arguably the most trenchant and stirring pieces Rebecca West ever wrote. This is partly because of the comparative brevity required – leaving no scope for the de luxe verbosity she allowed herself in later years. Another is the very clear-cut nature of the issues involved: blatant social and sexual inequities are bitingly denounced. Startlingly precocious, these short reviews and occasional terse essays sometimes collapse into self-advertising smartness but, at their best, have a cutting edge of real intellectual mettle.

Shortly after this extraordinary début, though, Rebecca's career changed course drastically: within just over a year, she'd moved from *Free woman* to kept woman. Typically, the trouble was instigated by one of her defiant flights of contrariness. Reviewing Wells's novel *Marriage*, which she eccentrically professed to find full of spinsterishness, she labelled him “the Old Maid among novelists”. Wells, who saw himself as “Don Juan among the intelligentsia”, rose to the challenge. Soon they started an affair; the second time they made love, Rebecca became pregnant.

The New Woman then found herself living through the old, old story. Determined to stay with his wife Jane (an especial hate figure in Rebecca's later mythology), wanting just sporadic recreation and stimulation with his new lover, Wells housed her in obscure lodgings – at the seaside, in the country – visiting her irregularly and infrequently. Partly drawn to Wells because of what she'd seen as his paternal qualities – he was in his mid-forties to her early twenties – Rebecca was, in time, caught in a plight not dissimilar to her mother's. It's no puzzle to see why her first novel, *The Return of the Soldier*, should take male unreliability as its subject, with a shell-shocked husband going absent without leave from his marriage and being discovered doting on another woman.

As Rebecca worked on her next novel, *The Judge*, deep-rooted differences between her and Wells emerged on the literary level as well

John C. 116

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Brian Boyd

ANDREW FIELD
VN: The life and art of Vladimir Nabokov
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Vladimir Nabokov was always alert to the possibilities of biography, and especially to the possibility of disaster. In 1959, a year after the American publication of *Lolita* had brought him fame, a reporter stalked him on one of his butterfly hunts. When the butterfly he sought failed to emerge, Nabokov played up his disappointment before the reporter, in a parody of what the man might write: "And then I saw that strong man put his head on his forearms and sob like a woman." More than forty years earlier he had joked in the same fashion with his girlfriend Lydia Tokmakova.

In the cypress alleys of Crimean gardens (where Pushkin had walked a hundred years before) young Nabokov amused and annoyed a girl friend of his, who had a taste for romantic literature, by commenting upon his own movements or words in the reminiscent, slightly mincing manner his companion might be supposed to develop many years later when writing her memoirs (in the style of memoirs connected with Pushkin): "Nabokov liked cherries, especially ripe ones," or "He had a way of tilting his eyes when looking at the low sun," or "I remember one night, as we were reclining on a turf bank..."

To complicate matters, that quotation comes from Nabokov himself, posing as an outside appraiser of his own autobiography in a fake—and mildly querulous—review that was once to have been appended to his autobiography but has never been published.

In his books Nabokov turned biography upside down and inside out. His critical biography of Nikolay Gogol begins with Gogol's death and ends with his birth. His last Russian novel, *The Gift*, contains as an inset the invented young narrator's monograph-length biography of the real writer Nikolay Chernyshevsky, full of genuine scholarly detail but exuberantly defiant of every biographical decorum. In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* the narrator's comically frustrated search for the facts of his half-brother's life miraculously becomes not only Sebastian Knight's biography, but also a novel whose very story mimics all Sebastian's own fictional works, and at the same time serves as a handbook for biographers, crammed with precepts and cautionary tales.

Nabokov's interest in the problems of biography is not hard to explain: it fuses two of his most constant themes, the unrevisitable nature of time past, and the impenetrable uniqueness of the individual.

Though the past may be vexingly remote for the palaeontologist who has to reconstruct a whole species from a few fossilized teeth, for a modern literary biographer the problem can often be the reverse: to assemble only a single individual from a ton of papers and ten tons of witnesses. Nabokov offers both problems at once: some of his traces are like footprints in fresh topsoil, while other strata of his past seem down in the Tertiary. In 1917, when the Nabokovs fled Petrograd for the Crimea, and again in 1919 when they fled the Crimea for London, they had to leave almost everything behind: a vibrant cosmopolitan city, a cherished country home, a beloved native land, a young man's collection of books, two collections of butterflies, and who knows how many other mementoes. The special liberal, cultured Russia the Nabokovs knew has not existed for decades, and despite *glasnost* the régime they fled has little inclination to tolerate research on émigrés who never regretted their flight.

By the beginning of the 1930s many in the Russian emigration sensed that Nabokov already outshone the star of émigré writing, Ivan Bunin, soon to receive Russia's first Nobel Prize for literature. Throughout the remainder of the decade Nabokov consolidated his position as one of the greatest Russian writers of the century. As German tanks rolled through France in mid-1940, he and his wife fled once again. By the time the war ended, the audience and culture Nabokov had written for no longer existed, and its records were either bombed by the Allies (in Berlin), confiscated by the Soviet occupation (in Prague) or destroyed by the Germans—as were many of the letters and other papers Nabokov collected.

that Nabokov left in Paris with his friend Ilya Fondaminsky, who was also destroyed. Can there be a comparable case of a writer reaching the highest levels of achievement in one of the great literary languages only to see the growth in which he earned his laurels bulldozed out of existence?

Nabokov's biographical data divide not so much into two parts—pre-1940 and after—as into four different densities for four distinct phases. For his first twenty years, his autobiography, *Speak, Memory*, with its intense focus on childhood, necessarily serves as the primary source. For the next two decades of European emigration a single copy of an émigré newspaper, brittle enough to flake at any touch, may contain the only record of a particular event in Nabokov's life. For his next twenty years spent teaching in American colleges, there are thousands who knew him as a teacher but, with no idea he had fame already behind him or ahead, took no special note. And in his last twenty years of world-wide celebrity, Nabokov withdrew into the rigorously controlled privacy of his Montreux retreat, where that ton of papers still remains under lock and key.

How does Andrew Field, in his *VN: The life and art of Vladimir Nabokov*, cope with the uneven sedimenta of Nabokov's past? Abysmally, alas. Nabokov creates two devastating portraits of inept biographers in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight's* Mr Goodman, who can remain happily ignorant because so serenely confident of the power of conjecture, and *Pale Fire's* Kinbote, who intrudes on the privacy of John Shade but misconstrues everything because his own ego gets in the way. Despite all the satiric exaggeration in these two portraits, Field has managed to outdo them both.

In treating Nabokov's first twenty years, Field has sought to avoid *Speak, Memory* or to discredit its recollections. He declares, for instance, that something must be wrong with one of the most poignant scenes in the autobiography. Young Vladimir discovers from a newspaper passed around amid sniggers in his classroom that his father had called someone out to a duel, even though as a jurist he had recently published a celebrated paper brilliantly exposing the feudal folly of duelling. Young Vladimir spends the rest of the day in an agony of tension, picturing his father perhaps already dead from pistol or rapier. Only when he returns home and sees his uncle Nikolay Kolomeyev, the intended second, descend the stairs laughing as he looks back at his brother-and-sister-in-law, does Vladimir realize that for some reason the duel will not take place, his father is safe, and he can burst into tears of relief.

Field announces that the duel V. D. Nabokov alludes to in his paper against duelling has been tracked down. But in the press versions of the encounter he finds no mention of V. D. Nabokov's involvement, and concludes that V.N. seems to have been muddled. The muddle all belongs to Field, who trumpets as a major discovery what is merely a gross blunder. There is no reason for him to suppose even for a moment that this notorious 1909 duel between the leader of the moderate October party in the Duma and another Duma member could be equated with V.D. Nabokov's calling out a newspaper editor and not fighting a duel that *Speak, Memory* tentatively (and correctly) dates 1911. Throughout his discussion of the duel that he identifies as *Speak, Memory's* non-duel Field seems unaware that (as *Speak, Memory* tells us) Nabokov began school in 1911 or that (as *Speak, Memory* also tells us) V. D. Nabokov's article denouncing duelling preceded his calling someone out. Field does not take issue with the circumstances and dates Nabokov provides, he simply forgets them.

If Field had bothered to consult Nabokov's autobiography again for his new book and had then done some work in the newspapers of the time, he might easily have found the real facts behind the near-duel, facts which prove how accurate a memory Nabokov had. On Sunday October 23, 1911, after a week of prominent newspaper coverage of the affair, *Novoe Vremya's* regular writer of topical doggerel published an account of the challenge calculated to make V. D. Nabokov look ridiculous. If that was, as seems likely, the article Vladimir saw the next day ("Monday") at school, he has remembered it rightly. Vladimir's

rhymed mockery of the challenge his subsequent discoveries of the whole story's outline. Otherwise Nabokov thirty years later had every checkable fact correct: date, cause, the names of the four main participants, the name of the newspaper Field could have traced if he attended to *Speak, Memory*.

Nabokov had been able to save far fewer papers for his years of European exile than in his later years, but he showed Field almost all he had. Nevertheless Field remains ignorant of the broadest features of this period of Nabokov's life. (When did Nabokov stop living with his family? When did he meet his future wife? When did he write his books?) He has amassed scores of Nabokov letters from this period available in public archives, or visited the richest repositories of the émigré newspapers in which Nabokov was published or discussed. Not that this shakes his confidence. He intones at the end of Chapter Seven that the killing of V. D. Nabokov in 1922 "certain fundamental things had changed forever". Chapter Eight begins: "It is a simple but striking matter. After the death of Nabokov's father all mention of God vanishes from his poetry." In fact in the first run of poems preserved in Nabokov's verse albums after his father's death—and remember Field has seen these albums—God occurs in four poems out of fifteen, a fifth speaks as if with the voice of a divine creator, to others feature Christ, and still others refer to angels.

For Nabokov's American years, Field naturally dwells on oral evidence. But what kind? He presents the recollections of two Cornell entomologists, although Nabokov was never employed as a lepidopterist there, and ignores those Nabokov worked with at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. He offers impossible recollections from students, who, as for instance treated by Mrs Nabokov to tea from a samovar—brought in a valise from Europe, no doubt, and in spite of the rush to flee Hitler. Without access to the thousands of carbons of Nabokov's letters in Montreux, Field chose not to trace them at the receiving end. Much less excusably, he repeatedly overlooks Nabokov's own accurate published information, so that he can for example depict Nabokov nearly destroying the unfinished manuscript of *Lolita* in 1954, when by that date the completed typescript was already doing the rounds of publishers. As Nabokov himself correctly notes in one of his books, it was in 1950 and again in 1951 that he was on the verge of destroying the novel that would make his fame.

Field disposes of Nabokov's final "eighteen-year Swiss period", both life and works, in a mere twenty-three pages. He flatly declares that these years "should not be given great prominence, even though it is the best documented time of his life". But if so, why does Field not know that Nabokov lived only sixteen years in Switzerland, not eighteen, and from 1961, not 1959? Though even more meagrely informed of Nabokov's final European period than of his first sixty years, Field's confidence persists. At the end of V.N. he maintains: "It seems quite possible, judging by Lord Snowdon's photographs, that Nabokov suffered from some form of cancer in his last years. His neck grew thin within his collar, his cheeks were stretched taut." (In fact these photographs were taken almost five years before Nabokov's death, three before the first signs of any illness.)

When he died, the family withheld information for several days. Nabokov had died of a "mysterious cause" that none of the doctors had been able to identify. It was, in other words, a special, unique, individual death, even though it took place quietly in a hospital and was apparently triggered by a flu virus on his weakened physique.

That last line contains the correct cause of death, which Field encountered in Dmitri Nabokov's memoir "On Revisiting Father's Room". Nevertheless Field supposes himself able to diagnose cancer—on the basis of nothing more than apparent thinness—and in suggesting that the family avoided admitting to such a common cause of death because they shared Nabokov's own exaggerated sense of the specialness, Field makes clear that he knows nothing of the series of illnesses and accidents that weakened Nabokov in the last years of his life, but that he does prevent Nabokov's name from being put into the public sphere of another's personality.

Time has never been quite so unreluctant as on these Field trips. What of the other inevitable difficulty of biography that fascinated Nabokov, the need to know not only the person, but the person's personality? Here too

summer and fall of 1976 and again in the spring and early summer of 1977 wanted nothing more than for Nabokov's doctors to diagnose his illness so that some precise treatment could begin. Field ends his account of Nabokov's life unashamed of his own ignorance, even welcoming it. The less he knows, the freer he can be with malign speculation.

All historical researchers, whether geologists or historians, archaeologists or biographers, must sift and correlate what they have unearthed in order to determine dates and sequences. Field deems himself above such humdrum concerns and makes almost no effort to cross-check or correlate his data.

He declares that after the end of his engagement to Svetlana Zivert, Nabokov in 1924 travelled to Nice, "where he did [sic] farm labor with Italian migrant workers" and wrote once to Svetlana. The year was in fact 1923, and unsurprisingly Nabokov did not hoe and irrigate Nice's boulevards but the terrain of a farm a hundred miles away, not far from Toulon. A page later Field suggests that the novella *The Eye* may contain "fendishly concealed true facets of the real romantic failure of Nabokov in 1922. The Nice letter is emotional and very Russian. It was written in the same year and in the same sort of tone as his article about Cambridge." Svetlana's parents broke off the engagement (hardly a "romantic failure", then) not in 1922 but in 1923. The letter to Svetlana was written later in 1923, whereas Nabokov's article about Cambridge was published in 1921, a date correctly recorded even in Field's error-ridden Nabokov bibliography (fortunately now superseded by Michael Jullar's fine *Vladimir Nabokov: A descriptive bibliography*, 780pp. New York: Garland, \$80. 08240 8590 6). Two pages later Field states that in the same summer that Nabokov wrote a last letter to Svetlana, he also wrote for the first time to his future wife, Vera Slonim, whom he had just met. When, then, does Nabokov meet Vera? In 1924, the year Field proposes for the letter to Svetlana? In 1922, the year Field dates the "romantic failure"? In 1921, the year of the Cambridge article? I will let out a secret: Vladimir Nabokov and Vera Slonim met on May 8, 1923.

When he prepared *Lolita: A screenplay* for publication in 1973, Nabokov had recently been struggling with the morass of misinformation in the manuscript of Field's *Nabokov: His life in part*, and therefore set out in his foreword in painstaking detail his movements before, during and immediately after the composition of the screenplay, noting even the cabin numbers in his transatlantic hypothermia, despite these precautions against a hypothetical future biographer, Field now returns to let a whole year of Nabokov's life—spring 1959 to spring 1960—buckle, crumble and vanish up the flue.

Field has Nabokov leave Cornell in February 1959 to drive by car across the United States and stop at 2088 Mandeville Canyon Road, Los Angeles, to write the *Lolita* screenplay. In fact, as the published screenplay accurately notes, Nabokov and his wife drove not to California but to Arizona, and not to write the screenplay but to collect butterflies and complete the translation of *The Song of Igor's Campaign*. They then sailed from New York on the *Liberté* on September 29, 1959, for France, Switzerland, England and Italy. While in Menton Nabokov agreed to undertake the screenplay for Stanley Kubrick and returned to the United States in February 1960, on Los Angeles by train and then rented the house in Mandeville Canyon Road, where Nabokov finished the screenplay at the end of August. On November 2, 1960, they returned to Europe on the Queen Elizabeth. Unaware he was at sea himself, Field makes Nabokov finish the screenplay in the spring of 1959—a year before it was actually begun—and ships him off to Europe on the *Liberté* on May 28. Where could that horribly wrong but plausibly precise date have come from? By a special recycling date, have come from? Field, from the date the process known only to Field: from the date the Nabokovs first arrived in the United States on the Champlain May 28, 1940.

Time has never been quite so unreluctant as on these Field trips. What of the other inevitable difficulty of biography that fascinated Nabokov, the need to know not only the person, but the person's personality? Here too



A detail from Yousuf Karsh's portrait of Nabokov, reproduced from Karsh Portraits (202pp. University of Toronto Press. 0 8020 2242 1).

Nabokov sets the chronicler special problems. He insisted he was utterly independent of his time, perfectly free from influence of any kind. He had a hypertrophied sense of privacy: "I hate tampering with the precious lives of great writers and I hate Tom-peeping over the fence of those lives—I hate the vulgarity of 'human interest', I hate the rustle of skirts and giggles in the corridors of time—and no biographer will ever catch a glimpse of my private life." He placed a fifty-year restriction on the papers he deposited at the Library of Congress. He hid behind literary masks, and then retreated entirely from the public gaze to tranquil Montreux. Ensconced there, he fired off brusque letters to various editors protesting against factual inaccuracies or infringements of his privacy, and began to agree to interviews only if the questions were submitted in writing well in advance, so that he could prepare his answers too in writing—and then check the whole thing in proof.

Nabokov's attitudes certainly made Field's work as a biographer difficult, but they could have been no surprise: they were well known to the whole literary world before Field offered to write Nabokov's life. When the offer came, Nabokov decided it would be safer to allow a biography while he was still there to minimize errors. Setting aside his reluctance, he let Field see much unpublished material. Aware that this still left much unknown, Field began to suspect that Nabokov wanted him to produce "a falsified life". In an attempt to prove his independence, Field began to avoid *Speak, Memory* and other published Nabokoviana and tried to pursue new lines of research.

One of these was the old family rumour—totally unsupported by any facts—that Nabokov's father was the bastard son of one of the Romanovs, either Alexander II or his brother Grand-Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich. (The mere existence of the two alternatives indicates how purely speculative the rumours were.) When Field raised the matter, Nabokov toyed amusingly with the idea, dancing a jig: "I feel the blood of Peter the Great boiling in my veins." Years later when Field submitted his manuscript Nabokov discovered that his biographer had spent some time grafting the Romanovs on to the Nabokov family tree. Nabokov demanded that they be pruned away again. Field replied that he knew Nabokov thought about and feared the Romanov rumours, so they had to remain whether true or not. Apart from Nabokov's playing with the notion when it was put to him, Field could name only one piece of evidence for Nabokov's thoughts and fears: a diary entry, of which Field had a photostat, about a dream of intercourse with his own grandmother. In fact the diary entry (March 25, 1951) concerns not Nabokov's grandmother but an old woman in Ithaca, where Nabokov was living at the time. I cite it in full:

Dream: am attempting a cold and joyless copulation with a fat old woman (whom I know slightly and for whom I have as much desire as for a gorilla or a garbage can). The day before somebody in my presence was telling somebody that a third party, a man I knew, was for goodness' sake—marrying a fat old woman, whom I did not know, but whose name sounded rather like that of the woman I had in the dream.

The way to overcome the defences Nabokov erects around his privacy is not to read *against* Nabokov and the plain evidence. Nabokov controls the image of himself and his family very carefully in *Speak, Memory*, but instead of ignoring or foolishly attempting to undermine it, we can profitably analyse Nabokov's mode of control, which may tell us at least as much as another's artless frankness.

What is needed is to read Nabokov better, and to set eyes on everything he wrote. No one, however private, can leave behind millions of words of highly individual prose, casual letters and hurried notes without disclosing something of the mind behind them. Unless one has access to these words and reads them for all they can yield, it is fruitless to compile the biography of a writer who knew how to keep to himself. The foremost practical necessity for a Nabokov biographer must therefore be to earn and maintain the trust of the man or his heirs. Field's slipshod transcriptions, misreportings, misfindings, misconstructions, historical ignorance, inept guesswork and fatuous interpretations soon destroyed the trust Nabokov had once given him and ensured not only that he was not gradually given freer access to Nabokov's archives but that he was altogether barred.

Of course the archives, indispensable though they are, do not suffice for a biography. There are other Nabokov letters, rare Russian émigré newspapers, places and people Nabokov knew, to be tracked down in the Soviet Union, Finland, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, East and West Germany, Belgium, England, France, Switzerland, Greece, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Canada and the United States. Andrew Field has not traced even information available in many public collections in the United States, let alone in Europe. He proves himself allergic to accuracy and chronology. He cannot interpret Nabokov except by way of the animosity he has felt since earning the Nabokovs' distrust. He imputes near-hypocrisy to Nabokov, for instance, because V.N. "held biography in contempt and yet used it as one of his major themes in his fiction". Field should have been able to understand that Nabokov found it germane to parody biography to express ideas as central to his thought as the inaccessibility of the past and the uniqueness of individual truth.

As his deep-level explanation of Nabokov, Field offers us only the image of Narcissus. The mask seems to fit much better someone who could write in his first book, "Nabokov, I have mastered your themes. (*Nabokov, have I mastered your themes?*) See how your books lie carefully arranged in the window of my critical eye", or could round off another with this plastic pearl: "Done and done then. A portrait of Vladimir Nabokov, Russian-American writer of our time and of his own reality. *The End. Oh. The End.*" In his last Nabokov biography, Field confesses to "ways . . . in which I am too like Vladimir Nabokov to judge him". Now, he sees him as Narcissus. Recoiling from Nabokov's indignation at the thoughtless outrages of *Nabokov: His life in part*, the always ironically self-promoting Field appears in his latest book to have looked into the water, seen something unpleasant, and assumed it was Nabokov looking back at him.

John C. Iliadis

COMMENTARY

History's hero

Graham Bradshaw

PATRICK EVANS
Wallace, Guardian of Scotland
Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh

Wallace follows fresh on the heels of the much admired *Burke and Hare*. In explaining what drew him to this very different subject Patrick Evans has observed: "Something disgusts me about the unquestioned admiration Scots have for their past. Rather than building statues to Wallace, they should build statues to the common people who fought with him." Evans added, leaning rather heavily on the word "actually", that "People have ignored, in the national hero, the sort of a man that Wallace actually was; he skinned people alive, or chopped them up into little bits."

So, the first half of *Wallace* ends by showing him cutting out Sir Hugh Cressingham's heart before playing him to make the notorious belt. The play's true hero turns out to be Wallace's servant, Jackie Short. The play's second half ends with a sentimental beatification of the blinded, disillusioned Jackie, playing his Lowland pipes after the battle of Falkirk.

Such sentiment comes ready-made; its counterpart is rather slackly "knowing" cynicism, as when the psychopathic Edward I is given a pantomime villain's soliloquy—expounding his imperialism, finding his own "gamesmanship perfect", but complaining that he has underestimated the Scottish capacity for suffering and resistance. Nor are other speeches free of mawkish overwriting, as when Jackie's wife

provides an all too extended description of the Talbot-like heroism of a father and son—the son still alive but with an axe in his skull, being carried by a father whose intensity of grief ("water welling from desperate eyes") stops him from noticing his own mutilated foot.

Such local excesses might be pruned and adjusted before this lengthy, uneven but very promising play is taken on tour. Its vigour and strength appear in the scenes where its characters (and some of the play's glibber sentiments) are exposed to the appalling arbitrariness of history. It begins, very effectively, with two accidents. While on sentry duty near Kinghorn, gossiping and grumbling about the weather, Jackie and his brother accidentally kill a crazed, doom-preaching woman—on the very night when King Alexander's fall from his horse throws Scotland into turmoil. Later we see Bruce, Bishop Wishart of Glasgow, and even Wallace and Edward feeling a very human helplessness, and the play's penultimate scene brings these four together in a deliberately unrealistic but effective scene, to show how each has in some sense been destroyed. When the agonized Bishop accuses Wallace of betrayal, Wallace tersely asks whom, and what, he has betrayed.

The play itself has no clear answer to that question, but this drama of helplessness is more involving, and interesting, than the debunking of the Hero and the correlative hymn to the Common People. Theatre Co-op's production, by "Patrick Evans and the company", is very accomplished, especially in the scenes involving multiple action. *Wallace* is uneven, but also leaves little doubt that Evans—who is still in his twenties—is a dramatist to watch.

Inconsequential arts

Keith Potter

ROBERT ASHLEY
Atalanta (Acts of God)
Bloomsbury Theatre

The most challenging as well as the most recently composed of the Camden Festival's operatic offerings this year was *Atalanta (Acts of God)* by the American composer Robert Ashley. Born in 1930 and famous in avant-garde circles in the 1960s for his multi-media work and electronic music, Ashley has for the past few years been engaged on a trilogy of operas in close creative collaboration with a team that includes both other musicians (especially a very fine keyboard player who goes under the name "Blue" Gene Tyranny) and visual artists (in the present instance, Lawrence Lemak Brickman). *Perfect Lives (Private Parts)*, the first opera in the trilogy to be written (1978-80) but the second in the sequence, has already been seen here in both live and video form; it consists of seven half-hour episodes. *Atalanta* (begun in 1982 and not yet finished in its video version) has three episodes which can seemingly vary quite a lot in length; in Camden each of the three evenings took over two hours, including separate computerized multi-slide projections.

Ashley's idea of opera is closer to most people's notion of music-theatre. In *Atalanta* he uses just five performers on stage, plus some additional taped material—notably a small chorus which produces short and somewhat inane tonal refrains from time to time. Four of the performers, including Ashley himself, contribute various mixtures of speech and song; most of the words appear to be by Ashley. The fifth performer is Tyranny, who plays a variety of electronic keyboard instruments set out on a long table; he also occasionally speaks or sings. His playing provides much of the musical input; it seems that he composes it too. The general effect lies far from either "classical" or "avant-garde" music: it is more like an improvisatory mixture of jazz, rock and country music styles. Some of it is very laid back in a manner familiar from earlier collaborations with Ashley. But quite a lot is also loud and fairly punchy; each night there was half an hour of initially rather exciting up-tempo material that accompanied some incessant fast alterna-

tions between the singer/speakers.

The activities of the other four performers and their relationship to the *Atalanta* myth on which the opera is purportedly based are almost impossible to assess. The set for all three evenings is supposed to be the *oedipal* sanctum of life-size dummies, weirdly lit, that is "interpreted" via the surveillance mechanisms of a flying saucer seeking the mythical *Atalanta's* wedding, but actually ending up in an apparently confused state around the year 1950. Ashley and his fellow singer/speakers provide an enormous number of words during the six or seven hours, including both entertaining stories and long, rambling monologues. But it is soon apparent that any connections between the myth and what we experience must be strictly provisional, vague, and ultimately, perhaps, as inconsequential as much of the music.

The unseen enemy

William Shawcross

Platoon
Various cinemas

Platoon, as almost everyone must now know, is a film about America's war in Vietnam which was refused finance by American producers, found money only in Britain, went on to be a smash hit in the United States and has also gathered a whole shelf of Oscars.

Platoon is, as far as I know, the first Vietnam film to try and tell the story like it was for the ordinary American grunt. As such it has absolutely nothing in common with the absurd fantasies of the Rambo films, with such bad jokes as Chuck Norris's *Missing in Action*, or with the rather nasty fictions of *The Deer Hunter*. Previously I have thought that the film which best portrayed the insanity of Vietnam was *Apocalypse Now*—although, in the second half it becomes completely insane and, for me at least, largely incomprehensible. But both halves of *Apocalypse* were allegorical. There is nothing allegorical about *Platoon*.

It was made by Oliver Stone, himself a war veteran with an obsession to explain how Vietnam felt to him and to other boys picked mostly from poor America and thrust into fighting an unseen and completely unknowable

Mutual harassment

Michael Hofmann

BOTHOSTRAUSS
The Tourist Guide
Almeida Theatre

The plays of Botho Strauss are apparently more popular with German theatres than with German critics. However, I still cannot believe that *The Tourist Guide* can have been intended to be as miserably ambivalent and unsatisfying as this English première makes out. Beneath the square of a victory arch as high as Stonehenge, Pierre Audi has directed a couple of pygmies as the guide herself, Kristine Richter (played by Tilda Swinton), and the teacher Martin (Paul Freeman).

The play concerns the *amour de voyage* of these two, in Greece; among other factors that play on them are the heat, culture, a generation gap (he is twenty years her senior), male and female archetypes; and we are shown their gradual decline into an exhausted barbarism. How well these things come over, and to what degree we can sympathize with, or even understand them, is another matter. It begins brightly enough, with a scene like a comic sketch: the leggy guide skipping about the ruins of the Olympic stadium, booming out her commentary. Paul Freeman is never convincing as a teacher—one would have believed him if he'd

said "I'm a spy" or "an Italian matinee idol", but as Kristine's lover he is quite absurd. The rest of the play consists of their portentous mutual harassment. Kristine has another commitment, to a "genius" named Vassili, bent on destroying himself with drink (a delightfully passive performance by Michael Dafre), and once he is gone, and the couple take to the hills, there is really no respite for the audience: the ranting, the face smeared with clay, Oliver Knussen's fits-and-starts music, the tape repeating lines we have just heard.

It is hard to put together an idea of how Strauss's play might have been from the version put on here. There seems to be an idea of descent, through different types of theatre, from the literal and the psychological down to the abstract and the archetypal. Love is portrayed as a kind of dementia, radically opposed to civilization, and even survival. Stylistically, one can sense a movement from the emotional jargon of the present, to wild and archaic forms: the tone desperate, obsessed and flat; forever the wrong side of comedy. Without all this, what we have is nothing more than yet another Games-People-Play play. We have the genius of English for the specific, the humorous and the insincere. When, at the end, Martin reads from a mottled library copy of *Old* about Pan and Syrinx, and about "strangeness" and "sweetness", we notice we have had neither.

Superabundant sentiment

Tom Mason

GEORGE COLMAN
John Bull
Theatre Royal, Bristol

John Bull, or The Englishman's Fireside was first performed on March 5, 1803, and held the stage for some fifty years before sinking into that obscurity from which it has been rescued by the present production. The usual problems associated with the revival of old plays are peculiarly present when the play had been successful on its first appearances. The effect of time is often to render what had been solemn, comic, and what had been comic, obscure. The very topicality and modishness which pleased the first hearers may leave a modern audience coldly bemused, unsmilingly embarrassed, or feeling confidently superior to the ludicrous oddities of the past. These problems become acute when the play is one where the characters meet in rapture and part in agony; express hyperbolic joy and outrageous sorrow.

Peregrine (Terence Hardiman), a rather mysterious gentleman, is shipwrecked off the coast of Cornwall, and, having swum ashore with a chest of gold pieces, comes upon an inn, kept by an Irishman (who drinks), his wife (who is ugly) and their servant (who mispronounces his words), on whom most of the comedy of the play depends. Peregrine becomes embroiled in the affairs of a young woman (Julia Watson, "injured Simplicity"), who is travelling to a final confrontation with her seducer, the son of a local baronet. Our hero expresses the strongest possible distaste for the blackguard's actions: "O wealthy despoilers of humble innocence! splendid murderers of fancy! who make your vice your boast, and fancy female ruin a feather in your caps of vanity! But before he can right this wrong, he feels bound to fulfil a prior obligation to visit his old benefactor Job Thornberry (Joseph O'Connor), who has lost all his money and his daughter.

Meanwhile the young seducer is suffering the combined pangs of conscience and of thwarted love. His father, who wishes to marry him into an aristocratic family, has called a young reprobate down from London to persuade his son to obey. The honest Cornish son resists the blandishments of the dissipated Londoner who directs the wronged girl to a London brothel and aims to marry the anti-tocratic bride himself. This villainy is erasing covered by Peregrine. Father and errand daughter are re-united. The cast arrives at the great house, where the baronet is dispensing justice, and all wrongs are righted when Peregrine reveals that he is the baronet's long-lost elder brother. The good are rewarded with pounds and the bad punished with each other's company.

In a long poem, *Vagaries Vita indicata* or *Hypocratic Hypercritics*, A Poem addressed to Reviewers (1813), Colman claimed "my scenic Sketches have beguiled, Ingenious list'ners, till they wept or smiled". The Bristol revival raises some smiles but no tears. Of the more solemn scenes, Job Thornberry's aspirer to pathos, but Peregrine's are unimpeachably hammed. Roger Rees's production is, therefore, half a revival and half a mockery. The mechanism by which Colman engineered his comic scenes and characters is allowed to become obvious. It is almost as if the author wished to expose the underlying bogus nature of the play, and to confirm the judgment of Leigh Hunt, who wrote of the author that "he had no faith in sentiment... he mocked and overdid it, as a man does when he is telling a lie."

The film is explicitly horrible, it is a knuckle-whittener rather than a tearjerker, and it seems to me to capture very well the confusion, the terror and the idiocy of the war on the ground and the way in which it destroyed any firm moral values and convictions among the protagonists. It makes very clear also how all the war was for nothing. It has not been much welcomed in the Pentagon and President Reagan is not known to be an admirer of it. But it is having a fantastic success and has already made over \$100 million. It also seems to be having a cathartic effect for hundreds of thousands of now middle-aged men and for their families. They deserve it.

On a sumptuous scale

Barbara Everett

SHAKESPEARE
Antony and Cleopatra
Olivier Theatre

From the back stalls (and elsewhere, judging by comments in the interval) much of this *Antony and Cleopatra* is hard to hear. In a sense this does not matter. Peter Hall has based his handsome and coherent production on that image of Shakespeare's tragedy which a century ago made it seem unplayable. He accepts as literal the world-wide scale of its action, and sees as grand if problematic its diffuseness of form, its sequence of scenes far-ranging in place as well as ambiguous in mood and import. Hall both affirms the huge scale and—with the help of his designer, Alison Chitty—imposes his own unifying order on it. This is a Renaissance, even a "Veronese", *Antony and Cleopatra*, which translates the scenic into the picturesque. The great arena of the Olivier looks down to a skyless saucer of colour, high walls and a doorway ruinous already and fracturing to re-form to this or that new locale, but always fusing with the stage in one unbroken rust-red for Egypt, dimming to brownish grey-blue for Rome. Brocades and velvets on the actors intensify these colours into rich cornellians and petrol blues, with much glimmering of armour, and with white and gilt for the leading women: Octavia in silk looks like a baroque pearl and the robed Cleopatra dies into an icon ablaze with gold. One sumptuous picture succeeds another as if we were seeing the work of a distinguished Victorian antiquarian painter of the Renaissance.

The Life's-a-Party party

Phillip Whitehead

DOUGLUCIE
Fashion
The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon

There is a horrible hedonism about success in the 1980s. Its image-pedlars measure out their lives on Ansonphones, wear the sleeves of their jackets rolled, sell themselves to any client. Doug Lucie's *Fashion* at The Other Place is a modern morality play which is never afraid to look forward. It is about image, and manipulation, and the sour smell of success. The anti-hero, Paul Cash, has a simple philosophy; get up early and become very, very rich. We see him at morning's first light, squirming naked through his routine Canadian Army exercises like a hog at a forest water-hole, while the answering machine plays back the overnight calls. Cash, wonderfully portrayed by Brian Cox, runs an advertising agency which will promote any client, by any means; tomorrow the Tories, next week South African holidays.

To his trendy, tasteless office, where he sleeps, drinks, fornicates and grows rich, come a gallery of modern grotesques, some to make love, some to make class war. The love, whether with rent boys or the wives of his friends, is as much about power as the politics through which he moves. The war is between the classes, but within the parties. To make his film projecting a new image for the Tories, Cash yokes together two men who hated each other fraternally in the old Labour Party. Charles (Alan Armstrong) is a broken-down middle-class activist of the radical 1960s, who has degenerated from art films to soft porn through a "praise Marx and pass the brandy" working-class ex-Labour MP now a renegade pundit for the Murdoch press. Both characters are superbly captured, especially Bright, as a depressed and bouffant as Michael Heseltine, as acid as that Socrates of the saloon bar, Brian Walden. Bright is venomous about the middle-class socialists he once knew. His early radicalism concerned personal advancement for people like him; so by definition Thatcher's Britain has become the workers' State.

ance: till in the second half the frame enlarges to include the whole theatre, as rust-and-brown and blue-and-bronze warriors shout, pose on heights, and rush their spears and emblems and thundering drums up and down gangways, with the red stage on fire behind them.

The fighting is, as it happens, off-stage in Shakespeare's actual play. And the director's magnificent visual spectacle is enjoyed at a certain cost. The tragedy as written is peopled (significantly, given its nominal concern with the very great) with fine minor roles, which in this production go for little: the bit-part players are better at bearing spears than at doing much else. The lead-playing is by contrast very good, but again within the terms dictated by the production: clear and persuasive yet without some essential self-definition, or self-containment, which this Roman tragedy seems to demand. Octavius (Tim Piggott-Smith) looks good, speaks well, and carries weight, even if the character's impassive drive towards Empire is here supplemented by a neurotic fear of contact and a near-incestuous feeling for his sister. Michael Bryant gives his quiet plebeian Enobarbus a finely reflective "The barge she sat in . . .", though there is no hint elsewhere of the sense of honour that makes his betrayal of Antony a tragedy, and his own death a mystery.

Lack of concern for this sense of honour, of ambitious and aristocratic pride, is perhaps the production's chief weakness and creates problems for the principals. Anthony Hopkins' Antony has a grizzled charm and mildness which make his farewell to his servants extremely touching; he communicates less, however, of the world-leader's rage and gener-

osity, his courage and lechery, above all of his dangerous edge, the power to alarm. The production's star is Judi Dench, and her Cleopatra is admirably attentive to the nuances and contours of the role. Intense, if studied, in her energies, she prowls and rups and coos and never for an instant fails to interest. Yet, partly perhaps because of the helpless sense of integrity she imparts as an actress, partly because of the mastering elegance of the whole production, she never quite (even when punching messengers) gets what is terrible and beautiful in Cleopatra: the repose of her effortless sense of power. Both these players are, in the end, just too nice, too sympathetic; neither finally achieves exceptionality, that extraordinary human authority which lifts the play into tragedy.

In its central performances as elsewhere, this is the kind of production that has everything except a kind of essential rightness. In this it contrasts with the *Henry IV* plays at the Old

The masks behind the man

David Nokes

Arena: The Waugh Trilogy
BBC2

Nicholas Shakespeare's three-part portrait of Evelyn Waugh began predictably with the *Face to Face* interview in 1960. Pug-nosed, baby-faced, sucking at a cigar, Waugh's physiognomy filled the screen with all the telegenic vulnerability of a melancholy comedian. He parried John Freeman's probes with characteristic feints of self-mockery. Asked if old age had brought any new pleasures, he replied, "I hear less." Asked what he looked forward to, his answer was death, preferably in a nuclear explosion. It was a consummate display of the pose, part eccentric don, part testy colonel, which he cultivated over the last twenty years of his life. His daughter Margaret recalled that her father's desire for death was real enough. "He had nothing more to live for." Auberon Waugh remarked that in latter years his father's favourite dream and recreation, like Pinfold's, was completing *The Times* crossword.

The three programmes took as a theme the poses and disguises of Waugh from Bright Young Thing, to would-be Man at Arms, to English country gentleman. In each case the pose was unable to contain or conceal the pugnacious and sardonic individual within. "He definitely was not a bright young person at all," Lady Diana Mosley asserted very firmly. "Not a natural officer," drawled Lord Lovat. Waugh's former commanding officer, the original Trimmer in the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, "A misfit," he added, breaking into a grin as he recalled, with evident satisfaction, having Waugh sacked for repeated insubordination. Anthony Powell felt that Waugh's attempts to affect the style of an English country gent, with his check suits and pork-pie hats, only succeeded in making him look like a bookmaker. Waugh's inability to give reality to these assumed identities derived from an irrepressible instinct for play-acting and self-caricature in their adoption. The programmes emphasized the element of the actor in his personality, offering us, like a series of crossword clues, images of him in various fancy-dress roles. There was Waugh miming and slithering in a blond wig in *The Scarlet Woman*, a scurrilous undergraduate film designed to lampoon the pederastic Dean of Balliol; there was Waugh as gossip columnist of the *Daily Express*, entertaining his readers with scandalous inventions rather than trekking the social circuit of deb-dances and hunt balls; there was Waugh as his opinion of a recent rule in the Romanian army that "no officer below the rank of major should be allowed to use lipstick"; there was Waugh as paterfamilias, entertaining his children with charades, but only of the most macabre variety, such as the death of Ian Fleming. Finally there was Waugh as literary crustacean with his set-piece tale of a poor dotty Irishman called James Joyce—"you won't have heard of him"—hired by the Americans to write gibberish.

Vic, which make mistakes and are wonderful—the acting in the small parts startling enough to shame the National, and a great Falstaff at the centre. Both Bogdanov's direction and the acting of John Woodvine as Falstaff seem to get their distinction from a profound respect for, a deference to, Shakespeare's intelligence—hence the endlessly inventive play of humour through these productions. Hall's *Antony and Cleopatra*, though impressive up to a point, is strangely humourless in a manner not explained by the simple fact of its genre (the superb Galley Scene falls flat, for the first time in my experience). Something vital to Shakespeare has got lost, just as too much in the incomparable language and style of the play—radiantly intimate, brilliantly complicit, full of humour and sadness and irony—proves inaudible in practice. Peter Hall has given us a major rendering of something curiously like Dryden's Restoration *All for Love*.

Yet beneath the love of play-acting the programmes presented a deeper but frustrated need to conform and to belong. His first marriage ended in divorce and recriminations, leaving him rootless, homeless and suicidal. His desire for comradeship and traditional loyalties as an officer and a gentleman was undermined by the alliance with Russia in 1943 which made him feel he was merely fighting to assist the spread of communism. He sought spiritual solace in Catholicism, but the liturgical revolution of the 1960s transformed the solemn mysteries of the mass into a disagreeable duty. The Nazi-Soviet pact had filled him with a clear sense of purpose; the enemy had then been defined as "the modern age in arms". But the modern age worked its way insidiously into the institutions that he cherished. The films presented the dislocation between his traditional ideals and the realities of the modern age by running his words over documentary-style shots of a 1980s regimental mess and parish communion.

The actor motif also served a utilitarian function in allowing Shakespeare to present Waugh's life through a series of fictional personas. The novels, he asserted, offered "a peculiar form of autobiography". Instead of the Waugh of the diaries and letters we were given Waugh as Pennyfeather, Waugh as Ryder, Waugh as Crouchback, Waugh as Pinfold. His Oxford days were presented as an amalgam of *Decline and Fall* and *Brideshead Revisited*; his army life treated as a blueprint for the *Sword of Honour* trilogy. This approach, though interesting, seemed dangerously misleading, blurring the line between experience and imagination, as if to suggest that Waugh's personality can only be appreciated as a distortion of fictional roles. Passages from the novels were read as simple autobiography and contradictions largely ignored. In his *Face to Face* interview Waugh spoke of a "lyrically happy" childhood, but Charles Ryder's complaint that his childhood days were miserably unhappy was given more force as an autobiographical admission.

The most engaging feature of these films were the interviews, with friends and colleagues. These former bright young things, now transformed into old devils, became like Waugh characters themselves as they read aloud their favourite passages and chuckled over toothsome anecdotes. There was Harold Acton, suave in the sunshine, asserting that "anybody would be depressed as a schoolmaster. I can't conceive that school-mastering can give any pleasure." William Deedes, with the perfect timing and deadpan utterance of an accomplished performer, sorted through the contents of the Boot-like, zinc-lined chest he had taken to Ethiopia to reveal a sleeping-bag full of holes. "Bullets?" asked his eager young interviewer. "Moths", he replied. Graham Greene, refusing as always to be filmed, allowed his words to hover through the film as a benediction: "He was the best novelist of my generation. When he died one felt as if one's commanding officer were dead." Placed at the end, his judgment was the final clue in the crossword.

John Coates

COMMENTARY

Corners, corridors and vistas

Frances Spalding

The Private World of Edward Bawden
Fine Art Society, until April 30

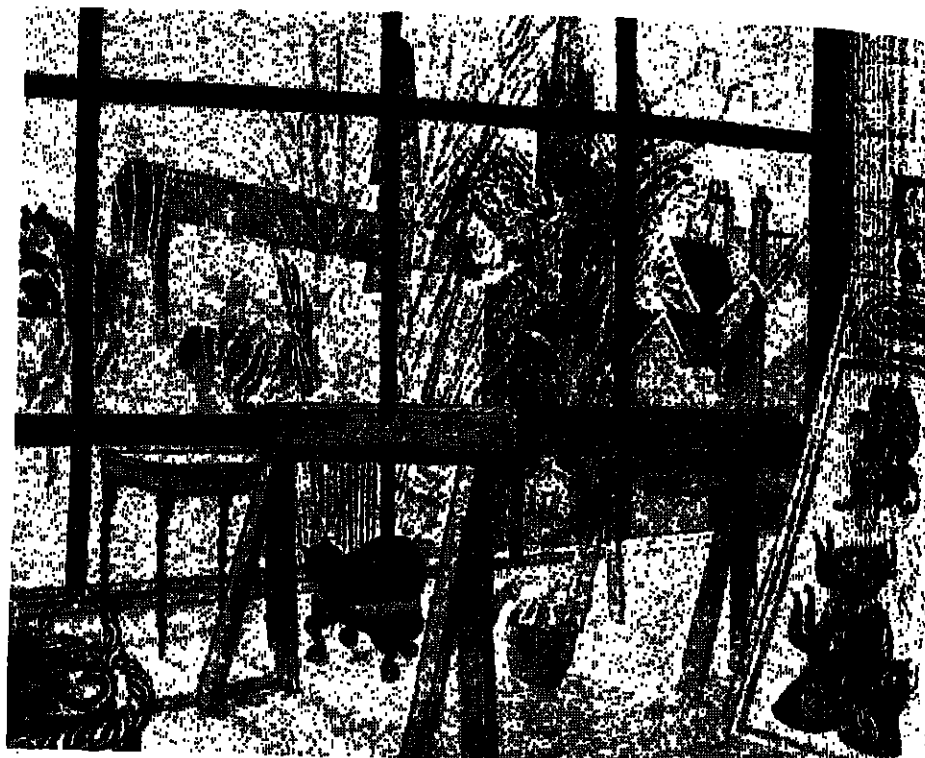
Unflattering and brusque, Edward Bawden's self-portrait determines the stance adopted throughout this exhibition. Nothing is fudged, fussed or fashioned for merely stylistic purposes. Using a watercolour technique that remains close to coloured drawing and rarely exploits the effects for which this medium is famed, he observes and analyses with a relentless detachment. Sardonically, he exaggerates the downward pull of his mouth and the grim ferocity with which he stares through spectacles and over drawing-board at what is in front of him. It is a stance that lets in the incidental but banishes sentimentality and any striving for effect. Likewise his flower subjects are attractive but do not cloy; and when precision is required it does not bring with it unnecessary finesse. Bawden is here, as ever, very English in his liking for the frank and unpretentious, for fresh observation, sound draughtsmanship and quiet humour.

What is new is his choice of subject-matter. As a watercolourist, he is best known for his views of the Essex countryside, its austere outlines suiting his spare technique and the clear deliberation that has also characterized his work as a designer and illustrator. But at eighty-four he has turned his back on landscape and has focused instead on his immediate

surroundings, on the various rooms that make up his house and studio at Saffron Walden, its sole occupant, apart from himself, being Emma Nelson, his cat. This change startles, given the protective carapace for which Bawden is also renowned, and which, fashioned largely by his resilient wit, has enabled him to side-step artistic fashions and ideological disputes.

On home territory he is found, on the whole, in gentler mood. This intimate glimpse into everyday surroundings might in the hands of a less abrasive artist prove dull and constricting. None of the views of interiors offers exceptional interest in the way of architectural features or furnishings, despite Bawden's collector's eye and his appreciation of Victoriana. He does not flinch from painting a gas fire, a bathroom frog or the cat's tartan snug. "Don't go running down the safe and ordinary", advised Sieve Smith, who shared with Bawden a capacity to take advantage of unpromising material. Cramped spaces invite the use of cropping: the corners of beds or tables create repoussoirs, or we enter the scene across a working surface or through the leaves of a plant. Space is freely handled; objects tilt upwards towards the picture plane, suggesting a high viewpoint which is negated elsewhere. The end result is always an encompassing view, one that incorporates as much as is needed to attract and sustain looking.

Bawden also knows exactly when to leave off. In "Gourd and Dish" he represents an elaborate blue-and-white, shell-like dish,



"Cat in Studio" by Edward Bawden, from the exhibition reviewed here.

ornamented with dolphins, goddess and putti, with marvellously economical use of the brush. His delineation is firm but never tight, his love of pattern pronounced but never claustrophobic. Only his use of line, taken by itself, can seem dangerously rigid. But when employed

alongside his loose washes of colour it helps produce work that is both bold and open; haunting, too, in its self-reflective examination of corners, corridors and vistas which combine to evoke a reticent, half-humorous portrait of the artist and his ever-vigilant cat.

The Musée d'Orsay: a qualified success

Stephen Bann

The new Musée d'Orsay is beginning its sixth month of existence with an undiminished popularity. It has shot ahead of the Louvre, and the permanent collection at the Centre Pompidou, with average attendance figures of more than 12,000 on a weekday and 18,000 at weekends. One can well understand what it is that draws in the crowds. After the long wait in the draughty forecourt among bronze beasts and emblematic figures, the visitor finally penetrates an exhilarating and spectacular space. It is like no other museum. Indeed the chief recollection that stirs in my mind is D. W. Griffith's set of the Walls of Babylon for the film *Intolerance*. In the transformed Gare d'Orsay, crowds eddy back and forth like extras directed by a master hand, against steep stone walls that will never be exposed to wind and rain. Occasionally, an ecstatic, gesturing figure singles itself out from the rest. But that, of course, is one of the vast collection of nineteenth-century plasters and bronzes.

But whose interests are served, in the end, by this brilliantly contrived spectacle? It seems as if the visitor is the target of at least three bids for attention, and these cannot fail to be in competition with one another. Architecture and History beckon invitingly. The visitor is tempted into intricately differing levels, wooed by elevators and caught up by the sheer virtuosity of the distribution of space. At the same time, an abundant treasury of objects from the period 1848 to 1914 is laid out for inspection, with numerous temporary displays and instructive didactic areas offering more specific knowledge of the visual culture of the times. (Two exhibitions in prospect are *Dictionaries and Artists' Houses*.) About the architectural effect, there can be no doubt; and nor can there be any disputing the fact that the Musée d'Orsay puts before us a wealth of historical material, adding enormously to the stock of nineteenth-century art on public display. But the Muse of painting is not necessarily well served, when Architecture and History have entered their stakes. There is a simple question which needs to be asked. Does the Musée d'Orsay make it possible for us to see these works in the best conditions?

Of course there can be no unequivocal answer to this question. One Aulenti's reconstruction of the Gare d'Orsay has resulted in the creation of at least three fairly distinctive types of space: those of the Station Hall, under

the great arch, which contain the bulk of the collection; those of the highest level, on the top storey of the former hotel, which contain the Impressionists; and those of the first floor public rooms of the hotel, which cover such fields as Art Nouveau and Salon painting of the end of the century. About the third area, one can only say that the gorgeous décor is remarkably spick and span, and the emergence of such legendary paintings as Bouguereau's "Birth of Venus" in such a context seems extremely apt. About the previous two, there must surely be quite serious reservations.

Clearly, Gae Aulenti has settled for an architecturally forthright approach, achieving (as Michel Laclotte put it) "two monuments in one". If she has not vanquished the industrial architecture of the original station, she has at least achieved a draw on points. This means that, within every gallery space, the architectural character of the décor is strongly marked. And this has the surprising effect of favouring the Salon painters, or at least leaving them unscathed, while it almost does violence to the great pioneers of modernism in the adjoining galleries. It is a shock to see Thomas Couture's "Les Romains de la Décadence" looking so good; such a huge, vacuous picture is, however, perfectly adapted to the spectacular dimensions of the museum, with its crudely modelled bodies in differing states of dishevelment seeming to beckon from out of their frame to the surrounding sculptures of the nineteenth-century school of Donatello. By contrast, Couture's renegade pupil Manet is ill at ease.

It may be very hard to imagine that a small gallery containing, among others things, "Olympia", "Le Fiffre", "Le Balcon" and the portrait of Zola could fail to be stunning. In the splendid new installation of nineteenth-century French art at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, each major Manet makes one stop in one's tracks, and catch one's breath. But at Orsay, the punch is pulled. A vast stairway with stone-clad piers cuts into the space at one side, while on the other an enormous round pillar surmounted by a block of what appears to be blue granite intrudes into the visual field. In this gallery, there is also (as I have verified on several occasions) a strange continuous humming sound. But all these intrusions are minimal compared with the effect of the hanging system: Manet's paintings are hung on a wall of stone slabs, which is drilled with holes at top and bottom, to admit the metal stalks for hanging; and the paintings are held in position by a system of pulleys and counterweights. The effect is to make the paintings

flating. There may well be an argument that it is good to see "l'art pompier" showing up well, and the moderns put in their place. But this is a singularly philistine view. The reason why Manet, and indeed Courbet, not to mention many others, seem awkward is in part because of the stone surface which has a strong presence of its own. What this installation demonstrates, paradoxically, is the appropriateness of the ordinary, stained or covered walls of the average gallery. After Orsay, the paintings in the Louvre have never looked so good.

Stone surfaces are not, of course, omnipresent at Orsay. In the rooms devoted to Impressionism, a variety of softly textured surfaces are used. But there are still the drilled holes at top and bottom, which have the odd

A friendly façade

J. M. Richards

The Sainsbury Wing
National Gallery, until May 10

We have had to wait a long time to discover whether or not the new Sainsbury wing of the National Gallery deserves to be greeted as a friend on the face of that well-loved carbuncle the West End of London. Now that the design, by Robert Venturi and his partners, has been put on view in the gallery it can be said that it will affront no one except those architects who believe that every new building should push forward the frontiers of architecture and display the new images created by new technology; and except those who believe that it should follow historic precedent with scholarly correctness. The public, in contrast, wants the familiar street-scene—the well-loved carbuncle—to remain as recognizable as possible.

Architects have lately had difficulty in combining modernity with quality or, alternatively, historical accuracy with functional necessity, except the so-called Post-Modernists, who have sought a compromise—generally a meaningless one—by selecting their variations from the modernist idiom as though shopping in a supermarket. Venturi is a Post-Modernist of a more serious kind; his shopping is more selective and more functional and yet more modest in the sense that, unlike the architects who took part in the earlier competition, he has treated his building frankly as an extension

of the existing Wilkins National Gallery and concerned himself with the total view, not with creating a self-sufficient work of architecture.

He claims to be "speaking a Classical language" but he speaks it with what purists will regard as a very uncouth accent. He makes no attempt to relate the language to the structural elements from which it sprang, but only to create neighbourly continuity. He uses a simplified echo of the Wilkins cornice, which however fades into the wall when it has served its reminiscent purpose. Corinthian pilasters copied from Wilkins's are planted along the wall, together with an extraordinary feature that will make the Classicists flinch: a column and pilaster sharing the same pedestal; and he repeats the same blind windows, but irregularly spaced. Elsewhere large apertures ignore all Classical canons and create some oddities of scale.

This is Post-Modernism—like it or not—in the hands of a master; what is more important, in the hands of an architect who has never taken his eye off the total townscape. The Sainsbury wing will soon become a familiar part of Trafalgar Square. A gap will have been filled; looking along Pall Mall there will again be an unbroken stone façade; the skyline will remain undisturbed. In a few years the main on the top of the bus will have forgotten it was not always there. Whether this kind of cleverness will advance the art of architecture very far is questionable. As an answer to this problem, this site at this particular moment, it is difficult to see how it could have been improved.

The need for a hard look

Jeremy Waldron

HARDEN AND NORMAN LEWIS
The Noble Lie: The British constitution and the rule of law
134pp. Hutchinson. £25.
(019 1641306)

As its title indicates, this book exposes many of the pretensions of British constitutionalism as fraud. Its conclusions can be stated starkly. We are not, as we like to think we are, a nation governed under law, with the public power accountable to the people. The government and administration of this country are not subject to effective legal control, and have not been for some time. There has been no serious attempt to subject the substance of ministerial power or administrative rule-making to judicial scrutiny or review. Parliament is powerless to exercise anything more than marginal control over policy-making and implementation. And the people are arrogant and comprehensively denied access to the information that would enable them to hold governments and administrators rationally accountable for their actions. If ministers or officials ever had a will to govern us arbitrarily or oppressively, or if they became reckless or negligent in the discharge of their responsibilities (and many people think that they do and they have), there are no longer the resources in the common law or in the British constitution to bring them to heel.

I do not know whether it makes matters better or worse that there is an alternative and that things could have been otherwise. All societies face the difficulty of adapting traditional forms of law and constitution to make the State efficient, just and accountable. The difference between Britain and other advanced countries such as the United States, Australia and our European partners, is that the latter have tried and have begun to solve the problem. It is a virtue of Ian Harden and Norman Lewis's book that they examine some of these solutions in detail (particularly from the United States) and suggest ways in which they could be applied in the United Kingdom. But it is shameful that, in a country whose constitution was once regarded by outsiders as the best balanced in the world, one should have to plead (and often plead to ears made deaf by the very vanity of our constitutional heritage) to have ideas about political and administrative accountability taken seriously here when they are increasingly taken for granted in societies that once shared our traditions.

The lawlessness of the British constitution in relation to individual rights and liberties is, of course, well known. For decades, British subjects have had to have recourse to the European Court to find legal principles to embody their rights and judges who are willing and competent to uphold them. But human rights are not the main focus of *The Noble Lie*. Harden and Lewis are concerned with all areas of public decision-making, not only those where there is a direct threat to individual liberty. For example, in the area of fiscal policy, judicial concern for individual rights will tend to focus exclusively on taxation powers, and may not scrutinize expenditure and borrowing so closely. But we want these latter powers to be exercised rationally, openly and accountably as well; and they are not at the moment. The book, then, is intended to complement other constitutional writings on human rights. But it also embodies the conviction that rights and liberty are best upheld in a general atmosphere of institutional openness and legality.

The book is structured by the idea of "immanent critique". The assumption is that political power is not exercised nakedly in this country but legitimated by widespread popular beliefs and expectations. People submit to decision-making by rulers, representatives and officials because they (or most of them) have a sense that this power will not be exercised arbitrarily, oppressively or unfairly, and that it is subject periodically to electoral, and occasionally to judicial, review. The idea of immanent critique is simple enough (though the jargon derives from Heidegger): it is that, as a part of the evaluation of a political system, we should ask what Harden and Lewis call the "particulate belief system" which

legitimizes political power, and then examine the rules and practices of the State to see whether they live up to those expectations. Since there is a widespread and traditional assumption in Britain that the power of the State will be checked and scrutinized in various ways, we should examine our political practices in the modern circumstances under which they operate to see whether they in fact reveal a constitution capable of doing this checking and this scrutinizing.

The authors use Dicey's phrase "the rule of law" to sum up this expectation. For them, the rule of law connotes the systematic exclusion of "arbitrary" power from public life, where arbitrary power is power exercised in a way that insulates itself from evaluation and criticism, and which is insensitive to, and incapable of learning anything from, its environment. (This is much wider than modern uses of the term "rule of law" by theorists like Lon Fuller and F.A. Hayek. But no matter: the ideal that Harden and Lewis identify is undoubtedly important, whatever it is called.) Their thesis is that law in Britain has the form appropriate to a nineteenth-century market economy—a framework that claims to stand back neutrally from private interests to let them get on with it—but that it has shown itself quite incapable of regulating, checking or informing the numerous administrative functions that are to be performed by ministers, officials and agencies, in the modern bureaucratic welfare state. Immanent critique reveals a radical dissonance between expectation and reality that stems from our failure to develop new conceptions of the relation between law and politics. There are two main results of this dissonance. On the one hand, legitimacy and stability in the United Kingdom now depend on the people being able to live with a lie (and how long can that last?) On the other hand, the arbitrariness of political decision-making leads to bad or corrupt decisions. A minister or official who does not listen to outsiders excludes himself from much of the information on which a rational decision might be based. And one who chooses privately which outsiders to listen to excludes himself from the information on which an equitable decision might be based.

I cannot do justice here to the detailed discussion of British political practice in *The Noble Lie*, or to the wealth of American evidence that Harden and Lewis refer to. But perience that Harden and Lewis refer to. But one or two examples will illustrate the interest of their approach. As we have seen in recent weeks, the British budgetary process is cloaked in secrecy. This is supposed to ensure that the national interest is not damaged by "leaks" in advance (though why Britain should be more vulnerable to this damage than other countries that go in for open budget-making is beyond me). It does not, of course, prevent the Chancellor from taking notice of the unsolicited advice offered by columnists and economists up and down the land, but it means we have no information about what advice or criticism he is responding to. This contrasts with the processes of negotiation and re-negotiation that take place in public between the American executive and the American Congress. Of course the British Budget is presented to Parliament too. But the opportunities for detailed scrutiny there are perfunctory by international standards. For instance, Parliament has no means of examining the amount or sources of government borrowing or the detail of the estimates of expenditure. (It is procedurally impossible for Parliament to propose increases in a department's estimate and proposals of confidence are always treated as issues of confidence.) Above all, there are no mechanisms for providing parliamentary scrutiny of the formation on which proper scrutiny of the Budget might be based—nothing corresponding to the Congressional Budget Office or to the staffs attached to budgetary committees of Congress.

Outside Parliament, ministers, departments, local authorities and quangos enact regulations of all sorts on matters ranging from building codes to banking. There is no general requirement that these rule-making processes must be responsive to outside suggestions; indeed, for many of them there is not even a requirement that the rule-making take place in public session. It is true nevertheless that outside advice is given and sought; but it is very much an *ex parte* matter, and the public has no

way of knowing that an official is not unduly influenced by an interested company or firm. By contrast, in America, the 1977 Government in the Sunshine Act severely limits the ability of federal agencies to operate behind closed doors, and many of them are required to keep records and give public notice of virtually all *ex parte* contacts. Certainly, there are costs and dangers (of tokenism and co-optation) associated with these requirements. But Federal administrative law has begun to address those problems too; it does not, like its British counterpart, take the slightest suggestion of a difficulty as a pretext for complete inaction.

In a similar sort of way, the law courts in this country have failed to match the achievements of their American counterparts in reviewing and controlling the exercise of official discretion. Provided that a minister or official is acting *intra vires* and that his decision is not so manifestly absurd "that no reasonable body could have made it", it will not be subject to review. This caution is based on the view that the courts should not be involved in the making of policy—a laudable view reinforced periodically by the effects of maverick judicial excursions into policy-making like the GLC "Fares fair" case in 1982. But the English doctrine as it stands leaves us with no requirement that officials should even give reasons for their decisions or announce the basis on which they have been taken.

Against this, Harden and Lewis propose a version of what is called "the hard look doctrine" developed in the Federal courts. That doctrine gives courts the job of ensuring, by whatever means are appropriate, that the agency has given some reasoned consideration to all material facts and policy options. If decisions are based on factual beliefs or predictions, these must be made publicly available for evaluation. If written comments have been submitted from the public, evidence must be produced that they have been considered. What that evidence amounts to will vary from case to case. But the courts are not necessarily trespassing into policy by insisting on hearing something more than an official's say-so to prove that a hard look has been taken at every policy alternative.

Throughout *The Noble Lie*, there is a sustained attack on the secretiveness of British public life. The authors insist uncompromisingly that a political system needs to be open at all times if democratic choice is to be meaningful at any time. Freedom of information is not simply a matter of modish chic. Quite apart from its positive implications for the rationality of government, it is the lifeblood of accountability. Without it (and we do not have anything in Britain remotely approaching the régime that has grown up in the United States since 1974) democracy becomes simply a matter of popular hunch and media hype. It is, as Harden and Lewis point out, something of a national humiliation that information of crucial concern to the British people has sometimes been made available only through the use of foreign freedom of information laws.

The idea of "immanent critique" leads Harden and Lewis to make recommendations which some scholars may see as disappointingly moderate. There is a large corps of British academics working in social and legal theory who are as aware as these authors are of the defects in our constitution, but who do their bit to perpetuate those defects by insisting that nothing short of a complete and radical upheaval (and perhaps the abandonment of the whole idea of the rule of law) will make things better. Some of the references and the jargon in this book (which is not, I am afraid, easy reading) indicate that the authors want to be well thought of by this constituency. I think they are wasting their time. The constituency they need to address is those who respect the immanent ideals of law and constitutionalism and who are prepared to engage in hard thinking about the detailed reforms and the institutional devices that might enable our political system to start living up to the expectations it engenders. For those readers *The Noble Lie* will repay very careful study.

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No one ever fully understands the politics of a country. Too many different sorts of considerations need to be assembled; and the relations between them are too precarious and too elusive. To see the politics of Mrs Thatcher's Britain perfectly – to see it as though through the eyes of God – would not just be to identify the direct consequences of her own actions in government. It would also be to judge what would have happened if she had acted differently or if others (of one party or another) had had the chance to act in her place.

Human beings can guess about such matters, and some will certainly guess with considerable assurance. Those who concern themselves professionally with politics, for example – politicians, journalists, civil servants, political scientists – readily acquire a sense of ease with their own understandings, a comfortable sense of familiarity. Most actual understandings of politics in a country like Britain today, professional as well as amateur, are singularly domesticated – tame – in contrast, for example, with those of early Meiji Japan or Weimar Germany or with the same countries immediately before or after the Second World War. Massive institutional continuity and the absence of acute political crisis within England, Scotland or Wales for a good century and a half sustain this mildly torpid condition with some ease. Even the re-emergence of durable mass unemployment and a protracted state of suppressed civil war in Northern Ireland have done very little to shake it. This degree of

habituation to the way things are is itself, naturally, a causal factor. But it is not necessarily either a good predictor of the future or a helpful guide to action.

Is it now true, for instance, as David Owen and David Steel optimistically propose, that *The Time Has Come* for a change? And if it is, for precisely what sort of change? Settings in which a more feral understanding of politics are at all widespread do not make one envious: downtown Beirut, the Thai-Kampuchean border, the Afghan mountainsides, the Broadwater Farm estate. But few creatures could be less feral than Mr Steel; and the modifications which he and his partner suggest would hardly in themselves do much to disrupt anyone's sense of familiarity: a better yesterday, as Ralf Dahrendorf unkindly mocked.

For all but the most flightily romantic, however, a better yesterday might well appear a handsome offer. Impeccably conservative in intention, the most pressing doubt it arouses is whether it can in practice be delivered. Aspirants to political power need to convince their audience that they stand a real chance of winning it, just as much as they need to indicate the merits of the uses to which they hope to put it. It is plain enough at present that the majority of the British electorate, even after eight years of being governed by Mrs Thatcher, feels no pressing desire to be governed instead by Mr Benn, or even Mr Kinnock. But there is equally solid evidence that they feel little, if any, greater inclination to be governed by the Alliance parties. The realignment of British political parties is certainly of importance, and a further decomposition of the Labour Party in the wake of the next election might be very important indeed. But few British voters are yet convinced that any extant political party offers the prospect of a decisive strategic alteration in the character of British politics. Nor is it at all clear that most voters wish for anything of the kind. The strongest demotic impulse, across the British political parties, remains the impulse to step backwards in order better to remain in the same place.

Parliamentary elections inevitably focus attention on the fortunes of the parties, a focus which television and newspaper coverage in representative democracies encourages, less hecatically, throughout the life cycle of a Parliament. The impact of Mrs Thatcher on the legislative activity and governmental style of the Tory Party in office is a matter of historical record. It is hard to dispute the scale and directness of her contribution to the party's prospects for forming its third successive government, despite the three million and more unemployed that her policies have induced. But it is, of course, a far more open question quite what her eventual contribution to the party's historical fortunes will prove to have been. And besides, it is not Mrs Thatcher's eventual contribution to the fortunes of the Tory Party that in the long run principally concerns even her own electoral supporters. It is her contribution to the fortunes of the country which she has been governing.

What really is at stake in British politics today? What is at stake not just in the conflicting proposals of the existing political parties and the impact of those proposals on the outcome of the next election, but in the consequences of governmental policy over the last two decades for the population of Britain, or in

the implications that potential changes in governmental agency or in the broader institutional order might have in the decade that is to come?

Even to judge the consequences of past governmental agency is bewilderingly difficult for anyone. Any modern society is awash with carefully tabulated information that bears upon these consequences, none of it self-interpreting and not all of it necessarily true. And over and above the morass of official statistics and public opinion surveys, there is always and everywhere the more pressing question of just what these columns of figures signify for the millions of individual lives they so hazily anatomize. But however impossible it may be to imagine the experience of a whole society, there are at least two kinds of reminder that one might hope to draw from attempting to consider it. The first is the dense, untidy and disorienting existences which politics professes to serve, with their erratic medley of heroism and ingenuity, laziness and vitality, grime and enchantment.

The second, blunter and more particular, picks out a range of happenings which ought on no account to be overlooked, that must in simple honesty be taken into consideration. There is a powerful tendency to presume that these examples will stand by ugly and discreditable: instances of neglect, suppression, even persecution. But they may, and with at least equal moment, be instances of precisely the opposite: of dawning concern, of bigotry at last abashed, of effective aid for those who have never been in a position to protect themselves.

To go in search of such reminders is an exercise in doubtful faith: very apt to end by conferring a specious externality upon one's own initial presumptions. But the explorations of others may be more edifying, and two recent travellers proffer their timely services. Beryl Bainbridge's *Forever England*, the book of a television series, centres on the gulf between North and South, echoing Disraeli and Mrs Gaskell and anticipating a preoccupation of British politicians today. Svelte enough to evoke real jealousy, the book is almost indecently charming. ("I was taken aback by the word charming. Nobody up North would use such an adjective.") Hanging over both North and South today throughout her journey is the shadow of a Liverpool childhood, full of zest and just a little loopy: "Being a child lasts for ever; the rest of life soars past on wings." Very good on courage and hope and fear, and superlative on absurdity. There is plenty of the last in the politics of Britain today.

David Selbourne's *Left Behind* is deliberately (too deliberately) less ingratiating. *The Journeys into British Politics* that it records preceded his celebrated quarrel with Ruskin College, Oxford (the trade union college where he used to teach, and where he incurred intense unpopularity for publishing his new opinions). They seem both to have been prompted by and to have contributed to a crisis of intellectual confidence over the merits of socialism – "steps on a long road to a greater intellectual freedom". More insistently political in his interests than Beryl Bainbridge (and decidedly more discreet about his own childhood) he is also appreciably more didactic, counterposing to the "sentimental fictions" of his former intellectual colleagues and friends, the abrasiveness and despondency of his own present judgments. The rejected colleagues have naturally hastened to return the compliment, fastening with particular glee upon an injudiciously sympathetic portrait of the controversial Bradford headmaster Ray Honeyford, with his right-wing views on multi-racial education, and on a somewhat steamy treatment of the Islamic cultural *Reconquista* in the schools of the area, and hinting strongly that these reveal an inadvertent bigotry on Selbourne's part. (This last charge is pretty odd in relation to a writer whose coverage of South Asian politics is so widely admired in the sub-continent itself. But then none of us is altogether in command when it comes to displaying our bigotries.) The thesis of his book is effectively conveyed by its title. But it is not in fact strongly supported by the book itself – and least of all by its treatments of the defiant municipal socialism of Sheffield or the Labour Party's protracted guerrilla warfare in the corridors of Whitehall. Selbourne's reports are too

impressionistic and inconsequential to be especially illuminating – too reluctant to dig through an issue and too ready to settle for sharp little vignettes or a striking phrase. More intellectual freedom is preferable to less; but is also good to try to reach some clear conclusions.

Neither of the travellers in fact casts much light upon the South, though both dutifully make their way to the Home Counties and *Forever England* has a delightful chapter on the life of coastal fishermen in Hastings. The most intractable reminders which they provide are unsurprising to a degree: the bleakness and desolation of mass unemployment in the great cities of the North and Midlands, its especially harsh impact upon their immigrant communities, the formidable additional impediments economic blight poses to more civilized and mutually open co-operation between culturally and linguistically distant populations. It had to exaggerate the urgency of all this, seen against the background of the progressive southern hinterland: the impress of empty unemployment on self-respect and personal competence ("Being out of work is like doing time"); the slow and painful struggle to construct a pluralist society of which none of its members need feel ashamed ("as long as there's stars in the sky these people will still be there").

These reminders are important because they underline what it is that has paid the principal costs of Mrs Thatcher's economic and political experiments and who is most likely to continue to pay them. At the very least those who have paid the costs are entitled to share in whatever gains there prove in the end to be. And there are, of course, other brutal realities, less directly attributable to the present government's policies but none the less exacerbated by these – the spread of traffic in hard drugs, the levels of violent assault. Until last year it had been a very long time since a lynching was seen in action in the metropolis. To push society towards barbarity is unlikely to be the intended consequence of any government's actions. But it is not only the intended consequences of its actions for which a government is responsible. The will to repress disorder and defend law is no guarantee that order will be secured.

Any assessment of British politics today must centre on the question of what Mrs Thatcher really has achieved. Dennis Kavanagh's *Thatcherism and British Politics* brings the resources of political science to bear in a sensible, if lacklustre, appraisal. He plainly expects the Prime Minister's lasting impact to be rather slight, partly because of the sober professional judgment that the impact of particular administrations generally is rather slight and partly perhaps because, at the time of writing, he understandably tended to underestimate the probability of her being re-elected at the next election. Only in the sphere of economic policy does he see her impress as likely (along with that of other right-wing governments elsewhere over the last decade) to prove particularly durable. What will last, of course, is not the technical details of the monetary policies pursued under her auspices (which have proved pretty transient already, nor even necessarily the priority of counter-inflationary efforts over other goals of economic policy (which can be reversed with a flick of the switch). Nor is it the goal of diminishing the proportion of gross national product which passes through the government's coffers and is duly spent on its behalf, an objective which has so far proved beyond the reach of any OECD countries. Rather, it is her emphatic stress upon the dependence of the great majority of the British population on the price competitiveness of internationally traded goods and services, and on the efficiency with which these are furnished by firms operating in the United Kingdom.

At the centre of her policies lies a bold and simple pun on the word "efficiency". For her it is comparative efficiency that explains the long-term failure of the British economy: the necessary truth of economics; but it is also inefficiency which discloses the corrupting effects of public welfare and the indolence and fecklessness of a workforce that together, in their turn, explain this long-term failure. On the other hand, the economic weakness reflects the inefficiency of a managed and unproductive

of labourers. (Perhaps, indeed, of other classes too?) It is to be rectified by ceasing to pamper them and by forcing them to choose between being dependable and being unemployed. The strategy for promoting efficiency – initially aimed at enterprises as much as at workers – is harshly Darwinian: the prompt extinction of the unfit. ("Look, we're bloody fed up with them", a Tory Minister explained to Dennis Kavanagh, of the party's policies towards the nationalized industries.) Because the government had been responsible for promoting this inefficiency (pampering the working classes and the nationalized industries), it can and must now exorcise its guilt by letting natural selection take its course.

As analysis of the post-war failings of the British economy this is a shade over-simple; and as remedy it has proved unsurprisingly destructive. But what gave it real political élan was its brazen equivocation between antique routines of class perception and distressingly salient features of recent economic experience. Armed with this equivocation, Mrs Thatcher has felt at liberty to take out the economic vagaries of a whole society for generations on a single generation of its workforce. It has been an ugly sight. But one side of her equivocation remains eminently realistic. It simply is true that any tolerable future for the British population depends on their economic efficiency as entrepreneurs, managers, workers, financiers and administrators in the decades that lie ahead.

This is not an engaging topic for any party to insist on, though it is certainly true that the Labour Party has found it more traumatic to acknowledge than have any of its leading competitors. But over any extended period of time, and even for an economy less deeply entangled in international trade than the United Kingdom's, it is scarcely open to rational dispute. (It is a mark of its cogency that Mr Kinnock and Mr Hattersley, despite the sharp leftward current of political sentiment among Labour Party activists and parliamentary candidates in re-

cent years, should now reject with such asperity the competing appeals of an alternative economic strategy founded on a siege economy, cowering behind exchange controls and tariff barriers, and orchestrated by its political masters to the immediate benefit of the millions who are now unemployed – the Albanian solution.) In this respect at least, and for all the crudity of much of their economic reasoning, the Prime Minister and her successive Chancellors have genuinely played a role as educators.

But the crudity has been of the very greatest importance. The productivity gains of British producers over the last eight years still come largely from the massive labour-shedding induced by her devastating initial deflation, while the exceedingly recent improvements in price competitiveness have resulted principally from a devaluation of the pound which the Government has already allowed to be largely reversed for fear of its effects on domestic inflation. The windfall gains of the North Sea have cushioned the budgetary impact of protracted mass unemployment. But they have done virtually nothing to contribute to the genesis of future employment or the wealth which would have flowed from this if it had been soundly based in the first place. These windfall gains will soon be over: a substantially unfavourable balance of trade is predicted even by Mr Lawson for the coming financial year; and domestic investment has been held down throughout the Thatcher years by drastic demand deflation and by real interest rates which have been crushingly high in comparison with those of international competitors. London may be a good place at present for the Japanese or the Americans to hold short-term financial assets. But it cannot be said, despite Mr Lawson, that the British economy as yet looks a promising basis for the future population of the British Isles to have to subsist on.

The Thatcher government, of course, is not only a national government wrestling with a set of refractory problems. It is also the government of a sectional political party. In this re-

gard it seems safe by now to identify a second formidable impact of her period in office. Within a representative democracy any coherent long-term political project needs to be presentable to the majority of the population. This is not a constraint that poses any undue difficulty for the first lesson which Mrs Thatcher wished to press upon those she governed. There may be rational doubt about the capacity of British managers, entrepreneurs, workers and even financiers, to cope with the strains of world market competition; and there is obviously endless scope for quarrelling about the precise terms at any one time on which they must attempt to do so. (Such squabbling is what routine politics in Britain at present is principally about.) What cannot sensibly be doubted is the necessity for them to learn to cope with these strains better than they have done for many years.

But in addition to underlining the wholly undiscriminatory and genuinely national (cross-class) character of this assignment, Mrs Thatcher has also sought, and with considerable success, to impart a second and markedly more partisan lesson. The purposes of the Tory Party (as Frank O'Gorman points out in his illuminating anthology *British Conservatism: Conservative thought from Burke to Thatcher*) have been as heterogeneous as those of any other durable national political force. Not all of them can prudently be avowed with any prominence in the course of electoral competition. On Mrs Thatcher's espousal of freedom for the populace at large O'Gorman helpfully quotes Maurice Cowling's gloss: "Conservatives, if they talk of freedom long enough, begin to believe that that is what they want. But it is not freedom that Conservatives want; what they want is the sort of freedom that will maintain existing inequalities and restore lost ones, so far as political action can do this."

The range of economic reward at present on offer (even within the law) in the City of London hardly echoes what most conservatives are apt to have in mind as the restoration of lost

inequalities. (Discreet mutterings early in the Thatcher years about the contribution that the unemployed might make to alleviating the servant problem were more revealing on that count.) But what the present government certainly has done – and has indisputably intended to do throughout its tenure of office – has been to re-establish a far higher level of economic privilege for those who play the central orchestrating roles in a capitalist economy and to spread this out somewhat more modestly to the wide array of cadres on whom they immediately rely. In doing so they have in fact for the present overturned the assumptions which were established by the Attlee government and sustained, despite intense marginal skirmishes and much mutual abuse, from the mid-1940s until Sir Geoffrey Howe's first budget.

Except to its direct beneficiaries (a relatively small proportion of the electorate), there is no reason to believe that this achievement carries any great intrinsic appeal; and even Mr Lawson clearly judges that an election year is not the ideal occasion on which to press its luck. This aspect of Mrs Thatcher's policies has always been very much at odds – as Neil Kinnock noted – with "the values and priorities of the British people as they express them whenever they are asked". That he is right in this judgment comes out quite clearly once again in the 1986 report on *British Social Attitudes*. On its most recent inquiry, for example, only 6 per cent of the population favoured reducing public expenditure on health, education and welfare in order to lower taxes, while a full 45 per cent, a figure which has risen in each year of Mrs Thatcher's present term of office, favoured a rise in taxes to permit more generous welfare spending. The same judgment is plainly the central premise of the joint manifesto issued by the Alliance leaders. In the face of this apparent disability, it is worth asking quite why the Prime Minister still stands any serious chance of re-election at all.

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values and priorities of the British people") is that voters can only ever choose between opportunities which professional politicians succeed in setting before them. As a political competitor, Mrs Thatcher is a bruising enemy, picking her opponents out one by one and highlighting their weaknesses mercilessly. Her greatest strategic advantage since 1979 has come from the split within the Labour Party caused by the foundation of the Social Democrats. Not only did this do much to dampen the pendulum effect of a virtually two-party system. It also drastically exacerbated what would in any case have been important weaknesses of the Labour Party, and greatly simplified the task of presenting Mrs Thatcher's own extreme, and in some respects unenticing, political project as one to which there simply was no credible alternative. There is still, of course, no guarantee that her luck will hold up. But the nerve with which she has pressed through this window of opportunity has shown a real instinct for political power and vindicated at least one aspect of her judgment against critics within her own party as well as those outside it. She has played to win, and so far she has won rather handsomely.

The Alliance between the Liberals and the Social Democrats has many number of good intentions. *The Time Has Come* is a veritable inventory of cultivated political judgment in Britain today, proffering virtually every expedient at present favoured by welfare state professionals. But the Alliance still retains the acute political vulnerability of two distinct political parties, yoked uneasily together; and the obvious impossibility of its securing a majority for the imaginable future within the present electoral system means that it has no need to develop, and perhaps can scarcely afford to develop, a clear political project of its own. In a sense, it is still too flush with the values of the British people and too nervously alert to short-run electoral tactics to have any firm priorities at all over an extended span of time. As such, it has evident defensive appeals for those who loathe and fear the Thatcher recipes for Britain's future, but too little political force to stop her in her tracks.

The predicament of the Labour Party, by contrast, is altogether more pressing. Mrs Thatcher has long been as eager to rid Britain of Socialism as she is to disembarass France of the same menace in the aftermath of the Paris Commune. The foundation of the Social Democratic Party was no achievement of hers, and has perhaps still to be of clear benefit in national politics to anyone at all. What it definitely has done, however, has been to deepen sharply the crisis of the Labour Party. This crisis results from the superimposition of two acute weaknesses—the severe long-term comparative decline of the British economy, and the increasingly evident debility of strategies of socialism within single countries in the modern world. (Since there is not at present appear to be any other extant forms of socialist strategy, this matters.) As Alan Sked's study of *Britain's Decline* deftly shows, the long-term weakness of the economy has been sharply intensified since 1918, above all by the increasing difficulty of controlling the monetary and tariff terms on which British producers have access to international markets. This has not been good news until recently for any component of the national population. But it has been especially grim news for the Labour Party. Even the Attlee government of 1945–51, Britain's first real venture in Social Democracy, was nearly crushed in turn by the convertibility crisis of 1947, the forced currency depreciation of 1948 and the savage budgetary impact of the Korean war. By the 1980s, the volatility of international capital movement and the intensity of product market competition from Japan, West Germany and the newly industrializing countries have left a weak and ageing industrial economy like that of Britain with the increasingly stark choice of turning its back completely on the world economy (the Albanian solution) or stripping from its own entrepreneurs and workers the intricate carapace which shields them from what in many cases would turn out to be economic obliteration.

The first of these choices is no longer very seductive even to an economy on the Russian scale (though it might be attractive still have some appeal to the United States). For Britain

at present, as Hattersley and Kinnock perfectly well know, it is a recipe for immediate catastrophe. Yet it is politically unclear that a Labour Party in government could in fact avoid moving some distance in that direction. For acutely unattractive though it would certainly be for any Labour government to settle down anywhere very close to Mrs Thatcher's clear, if brutal, alternative, only the most steadfast of judgments could enable it to select a definite resting point between the Albanian solution and her own Darwinian proposals; and only a rare (and quite new) degree of skill, luck, nerve and political solidarity could give it the least chance of holding its chosen ground. In consequence Mr Kinnock's heartfelt and often evocative revulsion from current measures is effectively muffled in the endless meanderings and evasions of his party's international and domestic economic policies. Few believe it to possess a clear and strategically conceived long-term policy for the economy; and fewer still, even among its own leaders, expect it to prove able to adhere to all effectively in power to such definite long-term policies as it does have. Hence the party's oscillations between promises of redistributive largess and expressions of class malice.

In many ways this is a very curious state of affairs. For Mrs Thatcher, for all her nerve and luck, is in many ways a pretty easy political target. The vivid blend of antipathy and disdain with which she views so many of those whom she governs is not in itself an electoral asset. It has brought back a tone not heard at the summit of British politics for an exceedingly long time. Even Nye Bevan's celebrated assault on Tory vermin seems by comparison more a rhetorical exuberance than a sustained pattern of sentiment. Nor is it only a matter of personality. The fanatical parsimony of the Prime Minister's overall strategy, however buffered in implementation by short-term political prudence, is intellectually grotesque. The relentless will that, wherever plan once was, market should take its place, and that public ownership of all but the means of destruction and repression should give way in every instance to private, is certainly connected with well-founded strategic judgments about the national economy. But the connections are loose and associative; and as a strategic judgment in itself it is notably ill founded, issuing from the narrowest of political purposes, and evoking almost as much disquiet within the ranks of her own party as it does among the wider populace.

To see quite how odd the shape of British politics now is it would be hard to do better than turn to Michael Heseltine's new book, *Where There's a Will*. In it, Mr Heseltine works from a confident sense of his own very gratifying entrepreneurial success, showing an innocent self-regard so direct as to be almost engaging. From the opening sentence it is evident that he has enjoyed his time in public life: "For anyone willing to serve his country, nothing can compare with membership of a British Cabinet." (Except, no doubt, presiding over one.) Long a leading Conference orator of "the most successful political party in the democratic world", and by 1979 in his own estimate the most dogged and experienced Opposition front-bench opponent of nationalization measures, he was hardly a man at that point whom any political acquaintance would have suspected of breadth of vision. Even now, indeed, he has rather few definite political ideas (and unlike some other prominent politicians—Keith Joseph, Roy Hattersley—feels no apparent need to dignify those he does have by associating them with poorly comprehended pronouncements of recent academic luminaries). But in its relatively discreet fashion, *Where There's a Will* is a clearer and more decisive indictment of the politics of the present government than anything that can at present be extracted from the pronouncements of its party rivals. Not that Heseltine has any inhibitions about economic privilege or feels the least apparent qualm about the justice of inherited wealth. But what he certainly does have is a firm and trenchantly expressed appreciation of the amalgam of the confused and the ludicrous that makes up the Government's surrogate for an industrial policy. He combines this, moreover, with a political feeling very bit as acute as the Prime Minister's and strikingly more attractive in its view of just what is in-

involved in the exercise of political leadership.

It is less than astonishing that the experience of sitting at a Minister's desk should have convinced him of "the emptiness of the Socialist's vision of an all-wise State". But it was less predictable that responsibility for Defence procurement and confrontation with the American armaments industry should have shown him so clearly the impossibility for any modern government of abstaining from attempts to mould and succour many of its domestic industries, or led him to acknowledge so openly the largely mythic character of free market competition over a wide range of governmental expenditure. Yet it is not on the whole this strategic background to the Westland affair which gives his new book its cutting edge. Rather, it is the record, in his own ingenious formulation, of "one of those priceless formative experiences from which every politician takes strength". For Heseltine the road to Damascus, famously, ran through Toxteth: the gutted shops and urine-drenched stairways of an urban nightmare. It is almost the only point in his narrative where his social nerve palpably wits; but, revealingly, it was not the denizens of Toxteth, "its prisoners and victims", who caused it to do so. Instead it was the busload of "extremely important and powerful people from the City of London, few of whom I had ever met", the insurance company and pension fund chiefs, the present Governor of the Bank of England, whom he had brought "to see and smell" the putrescent housing of one of Britain's leading unemployment blackspots. Brecht himself could hardly have imagined a more titillating encounter. But if Heseltine's own assessment of its personal value proves correct, it may yet matter to all of us.

For today the initiative in British politics still lies overwhelmingly within the ranks of the Tory Party; and it will continue to do so, if on very different terms, even if the next election produces a hung Parliament. This is not because there are no alternatives to Mrs Thatcher's policies. In politics there is always an infinite array of possible projects (albeit most of them, at least temporarily, well out of reach). And even within the narrow confines of immediate accessibility there is a huge range of eminently consequential choices. But there are very seldom many coherent long-term projects, all of which are simultaneously accessible enough to be initiated. Some very attractive options are at present simply politically unavailable. Sweden, for example, has recently shown that it is perfectly possible to combine respectable economic growth, virtually full employment, low inflation and a significant truncation of economic privilege, even in a very open economy heavily committed to international trade and in the midst of a recession. But what has made this delicate conjuring feat possible is the combination of a highly distinctive institutional structure, concerning the main strategic decisions of labour and capital, with a very clear macroeconomic and fiscal strategy. It has taken a good half-century of concentrated political ingenuity and the almost continuous governmental responsibility of a single political party to hammer this strategy out. However attractive its fruits might be to the British Labour Party, nothing about that party at present suggests that it either understands the institutional preconditions for such a strategy or has the least chance of pulling itself sufficiently together to design, publicize and implement a political transformation on this scale.

The importance of political continuity and of strategic coherence in the long term can scarcely be overemphasized. Every one of the most durably successful of the world's economies since 1945, socialist as well as capitalist, has developed a framework of this kind which makes it possible to plan and act effectively over time. No political force in Britain can offer much hope for the future until it can see how to shoulder this burden. Perhaps under a great leader the Labour Party could still do so. Certainly it still enjoys over much of the country a remarkable degree of electoral loyalty. But to hope for anything of the kind the party would need to face many realities from which it still averts its eyes. It would have to recover its capacity for concerted agency, and it would need great intellectual courage and authority to win through to the bitter end. For the pre-

sent, by contrast, all the Alliance can hope to do is attempt desperately to apply the brakes. Without a solid electoral following of its own, most areas, the summit of its realistic short-term ambitions is a change in the electoral system that would at least endow it with a less exiguous representation in Parliament itself. But it is wholly unclear how the log-rolling politics of coalition-formation in a multi-party Parliament can hope to promote profound institutional change or even secure the pursuit of consistent policies over any reasonable length of time. (Think of Italy.) What the Alliance can hope to offer in the short term, to echo Heseltine's favoured slogan, is merely "a caring capitalism", decked out with an array of busy reforming initiatives in health, education and welfare.

At present, it has to be said, the range of choices that Britain's professional politicians have contrived to set before the electorate is singularly uninviting. As electors there is little that we can now do about this, apart from pressing the absurd inadequacy of their offerings more sharply on the political party of our taste. Until they respond more impressively we are likely to remain very much in Mrs Thatcher's hands. But the demands on professional politicians are more urgent. A Tory Party, united around Mr Heseltine's conception of Britain's needs and capable of interpreting this clearly and implementing it effectively, would be a great improvement on the existing government. But that is not the Tory Party we now have. To get it would require a party that was less cowed, a party in which more of its members had recovered their political nerve and their capacity to judge for themselves in the face of Mrs Thatcher's bludgeoning simplicities and the crushing weight of her political personality.

A Labour Party still fit to discharge the responsibility of its impressive historical legacy of class loyalty would be an even greater improvement. But at least for the moment it also seems a considerably less likely one. For unless and until they are firmly surrounded, the party's reluctance to acknowledge the ancient intellectual evasions of socialism or to choose a definite strategy for future advance will continue to consign it to a dismal blend of sophistry and self-deception; and it will remain anyone's guess just what political forces will control the party in five years' time and what the party's real policies will then be. The responsibility for this squandering of the professional politician's most precious resource, the trust and patience of historical communities, is not confined to the existing leadership of the Labour Party itself. It fully extends to their former colleagues in the SDP. But neither set of political contenders has done much to deserve trust of this kind over the past quarter of a century. It is time that at least one of them learnt to do a great deal better.

If Mr Lawson's professed confidence in the future of the economy were well founded, a caring capitalism might not be too grim. And would no doubt prefer it to the open respectability of an uncaring capitalism, however energetically promulgated. (Think of Mr Tebbit.) But to embrace it too gratefully and passively would be to underestimate the scale of downside risk that has emerged from Britain's passive post-war journey, the millions of ruined lives, a Balkanized economy with its workforce "a separate race" (Heseltine), the savage hostilities of Haringey, Toxteth and Brixton. As David Selbourne's Birmingham social worker observed: "Nothing that Britain can do is going to change the bitterness and hate of this generation." And there is no reason whatsoever to believe that Mr Lawson's confidence is well founded.

Only the very sheltered, the inordinately selfish and obtuse, or the monumentally sanguine can really deny that the time has come for a change. It has been above all else her instinct for the extent to which that need is tacitly acknowledged by the populace at large that has given the present Prime Minister her political head. She has gambled with all our lives; and until we are bold enough and intelligent enough to forge a clearly conceived political alternative, it will be hard to stop her from continuing to do so. I doubt if she even fears the Kremlin any undue anxiety; but she certainly frightens me.

A tale of grievances unheard

Mark Bonham Carter

ANDREW JACOBS
Black Politics and Urban Crisis in Britain
23pp. Cambridge University Press. £25.

ZIG LAYTON-HENRY and PAUL B. RICH
Race, Government and Politics in Britain
20pp. Macmillan. £9.50.

Both *Black Politics and Urban Crisis in Britain* and *Race, Government and Politics in Britain* examine the state of race relations in the United Kingdom from a political point of view, looking back on how things have developed since the arrival of the Empire Windrush with a large number of West Indian immigrants some forty years ago. Both books should offer guidance to those responsible for making policy in this field.

At the beginning of each, an attempt is made to provide some kind of theoretical framework for race relations policies. At the risk of oversimplification: while Brian D. Jacobs is mainly concerned with the techniques and practices of access to government and government funds by black groups, Jim Bulpitt in *Race, Government and Politics in Britain* ascribes some of the problems to "peripheralization", a term used here in a derogatory sense. If I understand Bulpitt rightly, he sees peripheralization as an attempt by central government to off-load the responsibility for race relations policy on to local authorities or bodies like the Commission for Racial Equality and local community relations councils. He sees this as ducking responsibility.

Jacobs is concerned to analyse the motives which allow minority groups to collaborate with the established organs of government, and by so doing to bargain their way towards a better deal for their constituents. He makes a number of comparisons with the way they order these things in the United States, but without making sufficient allowance for the differences between the situation there and in Britain. Here, for example, the leaders of ethnic minority groups have a much less homogeneous constituency than do those of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or the Urban League in America; nor, in either country, should government policy be directed solely at the minorities.

The temper of race relations is governed by the attitudes and behaviour of the white majority. The majority acts, the minorities react. It must be the object of government to convince the majority that race relations policies are not conceived or administered primarily in the interests of the minorities, but in those of society as a whole. Racial discrimination deprives the country of skills it requires, and riots damage everyone. This message has not been successfully communicated by politicians of any party to the British public. At the same time, minority groups in this country are highly heterogeneous, both in that they are settled not only in the inner cities but, as Jacobs points out, also in the outer zones of cities and in some small towns, and in that they differ ethnically, culturally and by religion and expectations. It is a gap in *Race, Government and Politics in Britain* that there is no analysis of the composition of the minority groups with which it is concerned and the political and social consequences of their differences. Jacobs refers to them as "blacks", a shorthand which is a misleading simplification.

The common factors that unite them are that they are all subject to immigration control and all victims of racial discrimination. Expectations are a crucial factor. To make a generalization, the West Indian immigrants who arrived in this country in the 1950s regarded themselves as British and were shocked when they found that the indigenous British treated them as strangers. The Asians, on the other hand, with stronger cultural, religious and historical traditions, never saw themselves in this fashion, nor did they find in the British way of life much that tempted them to imitate it. (This may not be true of the generation born or wholly educated here.)

The differences of attitude within the minority groups are one of the reasons why we have never produced anything comparable to the Civil Rights movement in the United States. The total population with which we are concerned is about 2.2 million, or 4.2 per cent of the population of Britain. The largest single group is Indian (689,000), followed by Pakistanis, East African Asians and Bangladeshis. Though attempts have been made to unite these groups in one political movement, none has succeeded. Furthermore, as time goes on, that task may become more rather than less difficult. When immigration laws were the chief matter of concern, resistance to them provided a bond of mutual self-interest, and it

should have been possible to unite the various groups. The boldest attempt to create a coalition on the lines of the American Civil Rights movement was that of CARD, or the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination, in the early 1960s. It was launched, though Jacobs does not point this out, as a multiracial, black and white, West Indian and Asian pressure group; but it collapsed when the "paternalistic" posture of its white sponsors proved unacceptable to its constituents, who were much influenced by the Black Power movement then fashionable in the United States.

Today more than 50 per cent of those of Caribbean origin have been born here, as have an increasing proportion of Indians and Pakistanis; and it is only the Bangladeshis who find themselves in an "immigrant" position, victims of the Home Office policy of keeping families divided for as long as possible. As a consequence, immigration laws have ceased to be the main concern of minority groups, and social conditions within this country have taken priority, even if at the same time the cultural divisions among minorities do not appear to have diminished. Thus today it would seem no less difficult than before to create a united movement to fight for equal rights, against racial discrimination and for political representation. So far as political representation is concerned, numbers and the geographical distribution of those numbers are crucial. A fragmented 4.2 per cent of the population (compared to 12.5 per cent in America) provides a small base from which to achieve representation in Parliament, particularly with a first-past-the-post system of voting.

Black Politics and Urban Crisis in Britain is the more coherent of these two books for having only one author. Jacobs opens with the statement that "it is important to begin to make generalisations about black politics in Britain"; yet much of the rest of his book shows that, because of the fragmentation of black politics, that he emphasizes, few generalizations can be made and of these many are self-evident. There is no analysis of the relations between the very successful members of minority groups and the less successful, particularly in the Asian community, where there is a substantial business and professional class; no treatment of relations (if they exist) between East African Asians and those from the continent of India; and, above all, no account of the group which particularly concerned the Home Affairs Committee in its important report on Racial Disadvantage—"those young Asians

and West Indians for the most part born in this country". In his conclusion Jacobs quite rightly criticizes the "marginal" nature of many British policies designed to tackle the urban crisis, but he does not explain why they are marginal.

Race, Government and Politics in Britain is concerned with the political rather than the anthropological or sociological dimension of race relations. It contains interesting and useful articles on the background to Conservative and opposition policies, in particular "Conservative Ideology and Race" by Paul B. Rich and "Race and the Thatcher Government" by Zig Layton-Henry. The first describes the efforts of Conservatives to find an ideology that would reconcile the visceral views of many Conservatives, most eloquently and outrageously articulated by Enoch Powell, with the more liberal attitudes of "wets" and the ineluctable facts of the situation—that we are a multiracial society, that no conceivable measures can alter this and that the others have got to put up with it. Unable to reconcile these irreconcilable positions, the Thatcher Government has had to fall back on containment: containing the legitimate dissatisfaction of the minorities on the one hand, and the racialist elements within the Conservative Party on the other. But why is it that neither Labour nor Conservative Governments have been prepared to tackle race relations with determination or consistency? The short answer is that both thought it would be electorally unpopular. Whereas at times the Labour Party has wanted to and then drawn back, the Conservative Party has never wanted to but has fortunately dared not do what some members of its right wing wanted.

In the bright morning of 1967 it looked for one moment that a coherent strategy might be launched. No one who backed the Race Relations Act (1968) supposed, as Jacobs suggests, "that legal measures could effect deep social changes with respect to attitudes about race". The law was intended to affect behaviour and to provide the foundation for a serious campaign to change attitudes about race, whereby government, by setting an example, would persuade the nationalized industries, the trade unions and private industry to follow. That prospect was scuppered when James Callaghan became Home Secretary. According to the *Crossman Diaries* he was far from enthusiastic about the Race Relations Bill which he inherited and then dutifully put through. Thereafter he downed tools as far as race was concerned. With the advent of a Conservative Govern-

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ment in 1979 a progressive strategy was not on the cards.

The authors of these books are as much concerned with the present as with the past: indeed, they examine the past largely in order to understand the present. The difficulty of assessing the present was identified by the Home Affairs Committee, which noted that while there is available a large body of research on matters concerned with racial disadvantage, "it is impossible to discover the simple factual truth about some of the most simple and straightforward matters". One reason for this gap in our knowledge is that the Conservative Government removed the ethnic question from the 1981 census and cancelled the 1986 sample census. The position was made worse when, in 1982, the ethnic count was discontinued at Job Centres. Hence all of us, including the authors of these two books, have to depend on out-of-date evidence, on the Labour Force Survey, and on surveys such as the Policy Studies Institute Report of 1984, most of the material for which was collected in 1981-2. The decision to remove the ethnic question from the 1981 census had a second deplorable consequence. It postponed the monitoring of the employment and careers of members of the minority groups in industry. If the Government itself was uninterested in measuring the ethnic population as a whole, why should busy personnel managers overcome the resistance within firms and from trade unions to monitoring their own workforce? But as everyone knows, and as the Home Affairs Committee emphasized, monitoring is essential if the success or otherwise of equal employment opportunities programmes is to be measured. The Civil Service and Civil Service unions fought a protracted delaying action against monitoring and it was not until November 5, 1986, that the Ministry of Defence announced that it had at last accepted the decision "on the principle of introducing ethnic monitoring into the Civil Service".

The document announcing this decision to the House of Commons Defence Committee has a shabby tale to tell, in which the Army, not the Navy or the Air Force, is the culprit. Until the passage of the 1968 Race Relations Act the Army operated a quota system of a maximum of 2 per cent of "coloured personnel"; coloured recruits were specifically excluded from certain regiments, including the Foot Guards and the Household Cavalry (this was retrograde: when I served in the Grenadier Guards in the Second World War there was a coloured Company Sergeant-Major at Victoria Barracks, Windsor). The ethnic monitoring that they have now introduced is, though, inadequate. "It will be at the point of application only." There will, it seems, be no monitoring of the recruit's subsequent progress to ensure that his opportunities for promotion are not subject to racial discrimination. This response amounts to dumb insolence on the part of the Ministry of Defence and should not be tolerated.

The problems of the present are obvious and multifarious. They afflict the lives of the minorities at almost every point. Both books draw attention to three problems in particular:

unemployment (especially among the young), the riots, and relations with the police. They are closely connected. An overwhelming fact is the huge increase in unemployment, from which the minorities suffer far more than any other group. The PSI Report (1984) estimated unemployment among West Indians to be double that of whites, one and a half times higher among Indians and more than that for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. The *Employment Gazette* of January 1987 confirms these figures. Overall unemployment among "non-whites" (their terminology) was 20 per cent, among whites 10 per cent. If you take the sixteen-twenty-four age group, unemployment among "non-whites" was 33 per cent, among whites 16 per cent. In the inner cities the figures are even more shocking, most estimates putting unemployment among young blacks at 60 per cent. All the poor in these areas share the consequences of their environment in housing, education and absence of employment opportunities, but the minorities suffer from them more. The difference between the unemployment levels there of young blacks and their white contemporaries is a measure of the extent of racial discrimination and of racial disadvantage of which they are the victims. John Solomos's chapter in *Race, Government and Politics in Britain*, provides a fair picture of the situation and makes reasonable criticisms of the failure of successive Governments to tackle it; but his own proposals are tantalizingly vague. He should tell us more precisely what a concerted offensive against institutional discrimination would entail and what the measures are that would "change the structural bases of racism".

Given the massive racial disadvantage to which the ethnic minorities are exposed, and in particular their lack of political representation, and unemployment among the young, we should not perhaps have been surprised by the riots of 1981 and 1985 as we were. The surprise was compounded by the belief that the English are a particularly pacific and law-abiding people. History, including recent history, does not confirm that belief. Rioting is an old English tradition. Football hooliganism, the miners' strike and National Front marches in recent years have hardly been peaceful. The nineteenth century was punctuated by violence from the time of the Luddites and Chartists to the anti-Irish riots of the second half of the century. Nor should we forget the Liverpool riots of 1919-22 and the Fascist marches in the East End in the 1930s. Riots are often a cry from the powerless who cannot get their grievances attended to by the powerful. Nor is there much question that they make governments sit up and take notice.

The grievances to which the present rioters wish to draw attention are, first, the intolerable circumstances in which they live, and second, the difficulty of drawing these grievances to the attention of those who govern them. It is noticeable that in the United States, as the black population has been more fully incorporated within the political system and as the number of black mayors and others elected to office has increased, so the riots have largely



Katlin Arkell's photograph of a single parent family: Brixton, July 1986.

disappeared. The incorporation of the British working class within the political system in the nineteenth century had a similar effect.

Given this, it is not surprising that the police, as symbols of authority, should currently be the objects of anger and frustration. The force was first established in response not to crime but to disorder and the fear of growing disorder that accompanied the Industrial Revolution. Today there can be little doubt that relations between the police and some substantial sections of the public, in particular those under thirty and the ethnic minority groups, are in a state of crisis. The 1983 PSI Report "Police and People in London" stated that "the level of racial prejudice in the Force is cause for serious concern" and that "the proportion of young West Indian males who have come into conflict with the police is perhaps dangerously high, and the proportion of their conflicts with the police is very high indeed (over 70 per cent, compared with 14 per cent for the general population)". In 1981 the Home Office undertook a survey of racial attacks, which showed that racial attacks on Asians were fifty times the rate for those on white people, and on West Indians thirty-six times the rate. So it is hardly surprising that both the Home Office and the PSI reveal an alarming lack of confidence among these groups in the will or capacity of the police to protect them.

Put the horrific and violent Tottenham riot in this context and the reaction to it of the Home Office and the police seems to me to have been obtuse. The Home Secretary (just appointed, and just before the Conservative Party Conference) argued that "no useful purpose" could be served by a public inquiry. When the local authority proposed to conduct its own inquiry and I was asked to chair it, I agreed, subject to an agreement by the Metropolitan Police to co-operate. When I saw the Commissioner and before I even put the question, he informed me that the police would not co-operate with such an inquiry, and he added that the causes of the riot were known. The causes of the riot are still not known. The police inquiries produced contradictory evidence. Is it, for example, the case that in Tottenham the activities of drug dealers were a significant factor? If so, this distinguishes them from the riots inquired into by Lord Scarman. Or is it the case that, as some of the police alleged, there was a conspiracy? No evidence for it has been produced. Is it the case that at Tottenham there were "lakes of petrol"? The *Police Review* reported that officers present at

the riot alleged that the "lakes of petrol" were introduced into Deputy Assistant Commissioner Michael Richards's report "to support the decision not to enter the Estate". These conflicts of evidence alone would justify an inquiry. Without police co-operation I refused the local authority's invitation - wrongly at now conclude. Lord Gifford's inquiry proved well worth while and would have been even more useful still had the police co-operated.

Since then we have had the trial of those accused of the murder of Police Constable Blacklock. Three were found guilty, later acquitted on the Judge's instructions. In the case of those acquitted the Judge said that the police had been guilty of "oppression" and that their activity in the case was "disturbing and unlawful". One of the juveniles had a mental age of seven, he was held in a cell for four hours before his interview and informed that he could not have access to a solicitor or his mother. Will the policemen guilty of this behaviour be disciplined? Past experience makes one doubt it. Needless to say the spokesmen for the Police Federation defended their colleagues' behaviour, but then the Police Federation is a trade union which shows little concern for the public interest. When Sir Robert Mark was Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police he would put the police point of view himself on occasions such as this. It is a pity that his successors have failed to follow his example and left it to the Police Federation.

The riots, relations between young black (and young white) and the police, and the extent of racial disadvantage revealed in the PSI reports and the Home Affairs Committee report demand the Government's attention. The absence of such attention can be ascribed partly to the position in which the Conservative Party finds itself in respect of ethnic minorities, and partly to a failure in the machinery of government. An effective campaign against racial disadvantage cannot be the responsibility of one ministry in Whitehall. The lead ministry is the Home Office, but to be effective it would need as a minimum to co-ordinate the work of the Department of Education and Science, those of the Environment and Health and Social Security and the local authorities. Over the years the Home Office has steadily refused to accept this responsibility. That it will on the part of successive governments is a great question, as an issue that affects better or worse the whole of our country.

The end of union power?

Frances Cairncross

MARK STEPHENS
150 Years of British Trade
Unions: A Personal View
Ed. Stevenage: Spa. £11.95.
pp. 200 063
J. WRIGLEY (Editor)
History of British Industrial Relations
Volume Two: 1914-1939
Ed. Brighton: Harvester. £38.50.
pp. 200 033 6

The industrial peace of 1987, it seems almost incredible to recall the world in which the Thatcher administration took power. The United Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, has done his party no service by calling the era in his recently published memoirs (reviewed on page 429). In the winter of 1978-9, rubbish lay uncollected in the streets, hospital workers switched off the boiler, they tended, and in Liverpool the dead were unburied as gravediggers went on strike. This winter of discontent was the lowest ebb in the history of the British trade union movement. There were, as Mark Stephens reminds us in his *150 Years of British Trade Unions*, some pretty low points on the way. But since the Thatcher government was elected, the unions appear to have been routed: no beer and sandwiches at 10 Downing Street, no concessions to Red Lobbs, or to Arthur Scargill, no states of emergency or solemn-binding agreements. These books leave a question in the air: is this one more temporary shift in the balance of power between employers, government, industry, and organized labour? Or has something more radical happened to the British trade union movement, which means that neither it nor the political party it finances will ever recover?

For it is important to remember that we have been here before. That is the subject of the book edited by C. J. Wrigley, a thorough and readable résumé of the labour history of the first World War and the interwar years. That period falls into two parts. Throughout the first World War, as the labour market tightened, the unions increased their power and their membership. In 1920, union membership hit a peak of 8,348,000 - 59 per cent of the employed labour force. This period culminated in the industrial unrest of 1919-20. There then followed a period of extraordinary decline, during which union membership almost halved - to a low point of 4,392,000 in 1933 - before slowly recovering in the years immediately before the Second World War. Even by 1939, union membership had not regained its 1920 peak in absolute numbers, let alone as a proportion of the workforce.

The decline in membership and power largely reflected the impact of two successive depressions on British industry. One of the most interesting essays, that by Steven Tolliday, in the *History of British Industrial Relations* volume, charts the failure of unionism to get a grip in the motor industry before 1939. He describes the impact of unemployment on the Workers' Union, which had been expanding rapidly before and during the First World War among semi-skilled workers rejected by the craft unions which organized skilled engineers. "In 1918 it was the largest union in Coventry", he records, "The union had 90,000 members in Coventry and Birmingham in 1920. By 1923 it had fallen to 15,000. They lost 50 per cent of their membership in the single year of 1921 alone, and they lost 90 per cent in the 1920s. Their declamation effectively broke up union organisation among semi-skilled motor workers."

Through the late 1920s and 30s, in the years after the defeat of the 1926 General Strike, the unions were for the most part tame and respectable. They took part in a series of sensible discussions on industrial relations with a number of leading employers - the so-called "Amalgamated" talks. Under the guidance of Ernest Bevin, secretary of the largest union, the Transport and General Workers' Union, and of Walter Citrine, general secretary of the United Kingdom Congress for twenty years, they pursued a policy of responsible moderation. Bevin's book on the 1926 strike from the Wash-

tage-point of 1936, declared: "Those were the days of advocacy. Ours is the day of administration."

It would have been easy for anyone, that year, to say the sort of things about the trade unions which people say about them today. To see just how wrong that would have been, turn to Mark Stephens's book. This is an odd work, a sort of "edited highlights of the union movement", with forewords by Norman Willis, the general secretary of the TUC, and by Sir Terence Beckett, the last director-general of the CBI - the presence of which makes it clear that Mr Stephens has got under the skin of both sides of industry - and a set of curious little essays by various leading lights of the industrial-relations industry by way of afterword. The book is riddled with the sort of errors which slip past careless proof-readers. But for all these traces of amateurishness, the book is saved by the brisk common sense with which Stephens comments on every twist of the tale. He is an industrial relations director (of Thames Television) by trade, and like many such he is a gamekeeper with plenty of sympathy for the poachers, until they overstep the mark. And unlike many such amateurs, he writes clearly and well.

The record of the 1960s and 70s, as he recounts it, seems almost beyond belief. During the Second World War, as during the First, the trade unions gained enormously in numbers and strength. By 1947, their membership had risen to 9 million - at last overtaking the 1920 peak. Bevin had been brought into the war cabinet, Clement Attlee had nationalized 20 per cent of the economy. The unions thus not only gained from a tight job market, but acquired a lasting influence in politics. As for the government, it became the country's biggest single employer. No longer could it pursue a policy of non-intervention in the job market. It was there for keeps. The phenomenon which, more than any other, dominated industrial relations in the succeeding thirty-five years was the unofficial strike. This was the visible manifestation of the rise of shop-steward power, which was really shop-floor power. It marked a new tension between what unions wanted at local and at national level. As the national officials of unions became sucked into politics, so the gap between their aspirations and those of the shop floor widened. Even when they promised that their unions would pursue responsible moderation, they frequently could not deliver.

Stephens's main interest in the ten years from 1969 to 1979 is the two attempts, first by Harold Wilson's Labour government and then by Edward Heath's Tories, to introduce some legal framework to restrain the anarchy on the shop floor. Both were beaten off. The defeat of Labour's *In Place of Strife* is an inglorious tale of Cabinet disunity with the wimps led by the

same James Callaghan who now bewails the indiscipline which cost him the 1979 election, against the lonely courage of Barbara Castle, who led the first-ever attempt by a Labour government to limit trade-union power. Had she been politically more astute, or had Wilson managed to coax the Cabinet behind him, would history have been so different? Maybe not. The unions were passing through one of their periodic booms - membership, which had been stable since 1964, raced ahead by another one million between 1968 and 1970. And pay, unleashed after three years of restraint in 1969, was roaring upwards.

Edward Heath at least got an Act on to the statute book. But then his brief reign collapsed in chaos; he was brought down not in Parliament but in the coal mines, as he fought to defend the third stage of his incomes policy - a policy which, as David Butler and David Kavanagh have pointed out, the government "had repudiated when it was elected three years earlier".

Having wrecked the Industrial Relations Act, the Heath incomes policy and finally the Heath government itself, the unions reached the height of their political influence under the succeeding Labour government. The social contract (or social contract, as its detractors called it) brought about the increase in nationalization, rent control, price control, subsidy and redistribution that the Thatcher government has spent much of its time dismantling. The pay-off was supposed to be moderation in pay increases. But even this Danegeld ultimately failed to buy a policy which the unions could deliver.

So why has Mrs Thatcher succeeded where so many post-war governments failed? Why has she managed for the first time to introduce curbs on unofficial strikes, on secondary picketing, on political funds? Why has she proved that it is, after all, possible to introduce law into British industrial relations, contrary to what the 1968 Donovan report believed? There seem to be several answers. Perhaps the most important is that unions are composed of individuals, and a growing number of those individuals had simply become exasperated with scenes such as those of the winter of 1979. The unions were no longer the defenders of the poor and oppressed, but the undemocratic scourges of workers and consumers alike.

Mrs Thatcher also had a following wind, in the shape of the 1980-82 recession, which hit hardest at the most unionized parts of the private sector. Rising unemployment brought about the sharpest fall in union membership since the early 1920s. And the changing structure of the economy has helped. The new jobs which have appeared since then have typically been part-time, often done by women, highly concentrated in smaller employers: the very sorts

of jobs which have never been much unionized.

But it would be unfair to attribute the new industrial order just to luck or to economic circumstances. The defeat of the miners was a battle executed with more forethought than the Falklands war. It called not just for a strong nerve, but for a refusal to accept the fudge and compromise which have been the bane of every recent government's dealings with the unions. That called for a special kind of skill. For the British electorate has an astonishing capacity for hypocrisy. It may have longed to see Arthur Scargill's face rubbed in the mud, but that did not stop it feeling guilty when it saw somebody actually do the deed.

The question now is, will trade union power eventually recover, as it did in the 1930s? My guess is that it may, although not in the appallingly anarchic form of the 1960s and 70s. Trade-union strength clearly waxes and wanes partly in line with the rate of growth of the economy: by the early 1990s, at the latest, Britain will once again have a tight job market. It will be a job market employing many more women. But it would be rash to assume that women are, by nature, much less likely to join unions than men. They have always tended to be concentrated in employment with few unions - but that may just be another reflection of the fact that they have tended to be in jobs on the fringes of the workforce.

The new Tory legislation on industrial relations may eventually strengthen the unions. In order to ballot their members, for example, the unions have had to discover who they are, and where they live, and to put their names on computers. That may allow them eventually to offer their members benefits (cheap health insurance? cheap holidays?) instead of just endlessly asking for dues and support. The ballot, too, has allowed canny union organizers to pick their grounds for a fight with more precision. Not many employers have risked a strike, once a majority of the workforce has voted to support one.

The most interesting prospect then will be the one raised in the introduction to Dr Wrigley's book. He quotes an industrial-relations manager at Ford saying, in 1985, that the weakening of the unions has "whipped away the crutch which managers have been using for the past 30 years". Anarchic unions have been British management's excuse; they have also, to some extent, been made less responsible by the poor quality of so many British managements. Nothing is more frustrating than working for a second-rate boss. Yet in Britain until very recently only the dimmest undergraduates thought of a career in industry. If British companies can no longer blame all their woes on irresponsible unions, they may have to make sure that their shop-floor managers really are first-rate, at last.

minefields are, and how they should handle their own political colleagues.

This is an accurate and amusing picture of the minor and routine business of Government: the daily grind of settling interdepartmental differences, the lobbies who want this tax lifted or that grant extended, the minutiae of the annual Finance Bill, the timeless seasonal pattern of public business. No institution is better than the British Civil Service at coping with such matters. But, of course, these are not the things which put the system to the real test. It is when the village is caught up in the great hurricanes from outside that the real strains begin. Northern Ireland in 1972, the oil-price shocks of 1974 and 1979, the Falklands war, the continuing failure of British management and especially of the British car industry: these are events and issues on which there was - and remains - no simple departmental line, because departments were - and are - out of their depth. Policy has to be speedily improvised by whatever group of Ministers and officials can think most clearly and quickly as a crisis unfolds.

Ministers and Mandarins seems to suggest that many Treasury decisions on monetary policy are taken under similar pressures. The issues are too large and too novel for the departmental gossip. One must look to the

the ark of the covenant, the next all eyes are on the exchange rate. One minute the discipline of the Public Sector Borrowing Right, supposedly so central to money supply and interest rates, demands further agonizing economies; the next it becomes essential to boost programmes to keep the PSBR strategy on line. (Is that where we are again now?)

Bruce Gardyne rightly reminds all the would-be reformers that changes in the Civil Service with Ministerial cabinets and the like, will not necessarily make for better government when the big storms break. These are the times when the village begins to lose its equanimity and the decisions fall squarely back into the hands of Ministers. That is when you need not good managers but Ministers with nerve and determination. However good the engine room, there is, in Bruce Gardyne's words, "no substitute for politicians on the bridge who know where they want to get to". No amount of Whitehall reform will alter that basic fact about the government of men and women and public affairs.

Jock Bruce Gardyne modestly but correctly describes his book as only a tourist's guide to the Whitehall world. So he very properly stops his tour short of most of the turbulence and

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Marginal and seminal

Don Cupitt

PETER LEVI
The Frontiers of Paradise: A study of monks and monasteries
224pp. Collins Harvill, £12.
000 2725134

Religious professionals may be roughly classified into four main groups: prophets, priests, scribes and monks. Since they are expensive to support, their activities must be seen as being of value to society.

The prophet-type includes shamans, glossolalians, mediums and many religious founders. These people fall into trance or ecstasy and act as spokesmen for the spirit-world. They are charismatic and anyone can aspire to become one of them, so that they have included many women who could not have hoped to reach religious leadership in any other way. The priest approaches the spirit-world on behalf of the community. He is usually associated with a fixed sanctuary, a sacrificial system and a body of traditional knowledge and skills. The interpreter, scribe, exegete or canonist is one who can write. He may act as a prophet's secretary

and interpreter, or he may be a scholar who guards, transmits and expounds a sacred text. All these types are of obvious value to society; but what is the point of monks? It is notoriously hard to define just who they are and what they do, and why they should have flourished so greatly within two very different missionary faiths, that of Christ and that of the Buddha, between late classical and early modern times. Christian monks (using the word in a broad sense) have been solitary or coenobitic, stable or itinerant, disciplined or idiorhythmic. Perhaps their celibacy is the most constant factor. But what are they for?

Monks have some biblical and early Christian background. From Moses and Elijah on, heroes of faith went to the desert; there were "the sons of the prophets" at Israelite sanctuaries; there was the Qumran community; and there were the itinerant early Christian evangelists, Jesus' charge to whom helped to inspire Francis. Puzzlingly, Peter Levi, in *The Frontiers of Paradise: A study of monks and monasteries*, makes only the most fleeting reference to all this. He suggests that the monks originated as a protest movement at the margins of the Roman Empire. At first their hairiness, dirt, celibacy and so forth symbolized

their rejection of society. In time, however, they themselves formed strong communities and they came to be seen as holy men, colonists, missionaries, guardians and diffusers of learning. Welcomed back into society, they became great landowners and administrators. But this view of the monks as drop-outs who organized and became respectable does not fit the case of the Buddhist Sangha, for the Sangha was integrated into society from the first. Like Plato and Confucius, the Buddha was concerned about the problem of maintaining peace in the State. The Sangha was a society that counselled king and people alike on how to quell the violence of the passions and keep "cool" (*nibbata-nibbana-nirvana*). It was not at first either so individualistic or so "religious" as Buddhism later became.

An alternative theory of what the monk is about might start from Plato's founding of Western psychology in the *Republic*, or from Nietzsche's celebrated discussions of asceticism. The monk sought salvation, understood as a state of the self. He therefore needed a psychology. The experience of psychic conflict (the *psychomachia*), by showing distinguishable forces at work in the self, sheds light on the structure of the self. Thus asceticism, as

induced psychological conflict, becomes a method of psychological inquiry. It made possible and it gave meaning to the distinction between body and soul, between reason, the will and the passions, between short-term sense pleasure and beatitude, between the soul recollected and the soul scattered, and so on.

Both Christian and Buddhist monks thus developed complex and subtle psychologies. A second theme, best worked out in Augustine and indeed specifically theistic and Western, is the monk's attempt to heighten subjectivity and gain immortal selfhood through the relation to God. The philosophical principles involved have been very well explained by Heidegger and Derrida under the heading "the metaphysics of presence". Human social life is a theatre in which we act out roles, and our souls get dissipated. The passage of time robs everything of itself, including the self. Only God, being timeless, infinite and unequalled, is unthreatened. He alone is immortally self-same, self-possessed and self-identical. So to gain salvation, that is, to become a real self, must reject my fellow human beings and concentrate my whole attention upon the relation to God.

Thus, rather surprisingly, the Christian monk reversed the message of the Incarnation and sought salvation, not by the union of divine things and human, but by their disjunction. However, a Christian humanism did nevertheless manage to develop during the later Middle Ages, not least among the friars. Piety turned to Christ, to the secular world and to human relationships, and family life eventually came to be thought compatible with a developed religious subjectivity. The day of the monk was over, but they left a legacy. Their scrupulous self-examination and their somewhat disembodied mentality lived on in Western critical thinking and the scientific outlook. In a word, Descartes: the last great Augustinian, the first modern.

"Monks appear to be a product of monothism; the few exceptions to this rule can all be disputed", says Professor Levi; and yet he repeatedly discusses Buddhist monks. He also implies that Tolstoy, a Kantian, was close to Mahayana Buddhism. It seems that Peter Levi's interest in monasticism is aesthetic. His book has about forty brief, piercing, desultory essays, written in a poet's prose, and packed with inconsequential information. In a consciously old-fashioned way, it is beautiful.

Visions of verity

Henry Chadwick

JOHN BAGGLEY
Doors of Perception: Icons and their spiritual significance
160pp. Oxford: Mowbray. £25 (paperback, £9.95).
0264 67118 X

John Baggley, much travelled in the realms of Byzantine gold, faces the problem that icons have long been the vehicle of deep religious feeling among Christians of the Orthodox East, but have generally enjoyed a less intense significance for Western believers. So he has put together a serene little introduction for puzzled, perhaps even for philistine, Westerners who would like to comprehend more of the inwardness of all this. He has adorned his book with nineteen very fine colour plates, each with a discerning commentary on the iconography. The historical matter must be admitted to be conventional stuff, but in any event it is for the author very subordinate to his primary intention. It is never easy to express feelings and intuitions in well-articulated sentences, but the best parts of *Doors of Perception* seek to do that difficult thing. Richard Temple, of the Temple Gallery, contributes a brief appendix on the painting technique of the old icons, and is extremely negative towards the icon painter of our own time - to a degree that would be hard to justify. Father Baggley seeks that function of the icon is to evoke a recognition of the senses, especially that of vision, as being ladder to divine truth, not a hindrance to be kicked away by Platonic or Pietist spirit.

Eileen Barker, whose book *The Making of a Moonie* (reviewed in the TLS, November 9, 1984) shows what a cult is like objectively and subjectively, these authors show no empathy with people who have religious experiences, nor with those who have worked as clients in psychotherapy.

Jung and Mead are recognized in Claxton's book as important theorists about Mind and Self. Other theorists are ignored. Abraham Maslow, an influential psychologist and Buddhist in the United States, is not mentioned; nor are Serge Moscovici and Rob Farr, who have recently reworked the concept of Self in academic psychology.

Keightley describes "the revolution in theological thinking", represented in the work of Don Cupitt and D. Z. Phillips, "from within Wittgenstein's legacy". His style conveys the sense of excitement which many people feel when they discover Zen Buddhism, and *Into Every Life a Little Zen Must Fall* invites the comment that Zen Masters are fond of: "It stinks of Zen." He delights in paradoxical pedagogy and lightness, which are hallmarks of Zen teaching - just as Wittgenstein did in his pronouncement that the purpose of philosophy is to liberate flies. He presents the argument that human liberation from the necessary distortions of language is required if we are to seek truth that is not context-bound, and quotes Wittgenstein to suggest that direct apprehension of reality, without concepts, is possible. He believes that Zen practices lead to the experience of "Self" and "God", which is dangerously distorted by attempts to express it in words, and that it is those distortions that lead to suffering. The experience of being grounded in the one-ness of the universe is one attempt to describe it. Keightley's account of the new theology is easy to read. It avoids the difficulties of belief in an objective God, and also avoids the myth that the dominance of scientific materialism has removed myth as the structure which enables us to think.

In the course of his argument Keightley discusses some of the common issues relating to Zen. He rebuffs the idea that Zen treats victims callously by "letting them be". He rejects Aldous Huxley's use of drugs as a means of attaining concept-free perception of truth. He reinstates "ecstasy" from its derogation by Marghanita Laski. His argument strongly implies that Zen Christianity is superior to other varieties. We are Buddha and can realize this by the paradoxical process of gaining enlightenment through meditation, only so long as we do not strive to achieve it. The alternative is to imitate the perfection of Christ and risk feeling defeated by falling short of it.

Zen offers the triumph of religion as a therapeutic, which is why some therapists are trying to adopt it in their own lives. Clearly others, however, appear to reject religion as a vestige of ignorance and merely want to borrow a few techniques with which to improve the effect they have on their patients.

language distort reality. Using our mental faculties to relieve suffering will only add to it. The truth of who we are, and the joyful meaning of life, can only be apprehended by transcending the ego through meditation. This leads towards a state of "enlightenment" in which thoughts cease to torment, concentration is maintained, other people are given full and affectionate attention, desires are recognized but are not gratified obsessively, life is enjoyed, change and dying are faced in good heart. Both Claxton and Alan Keightley, in *Into Every Life a Little Zen Must Fall*, describe this well. The appeal of Buddhism to theologians lies in its concept of God. Meditation, used as a research tool, leads to a disaggregation of language, thought and understanding, so that the experience of God is direct and is superordinate to materialistic enquiry. Ultimately it becomes awareness.

Beyond Therapy will, inevitably, be compared with *Awakening the Heart: East-West approaches to psychotherapy and the healing relationship*, edited by John Welwood (1983). In some respects Claxton's book is less convincing. The nineteen authors are reticent about their own therapeutic and religious experience, and some of them are unable to step outside the scientific-materialist paradigm, dominant in academic psychology, which reduces statements about mental life to statements about physical structure. Michael West's chapter, however, reviews experiments which have been made on the effects of meditation on well-being and on physiological functioning. Scientific studies of meditation can be successful without loss of the spirit within which meditation is embraced in religious practice and enquiry. Susan Blackmore is typical of a trend which has replaced physiological reductionism with IT (Information Technology) reductionism.

I believe that the thoroughly materialistic information-processing assumptions of cognitive psychology form a very good basis for thinking about meditation. By accepting that "we" are nothing but models, constructed by an information-processing machine, we may be clinging to one "self".

She asserts that some computers and all robots are conscious. Stephen Parry and Richard Jones try to argue in their chapter that Skinner's rejection of the concept of Self as a "vestige of animism" has an important connection with Buddhism. They omit the essential difference: Buddhism looks to meditation as a research tool for investigating experience and mind; Skinner looks to schedules of reinforcement to change behaviour and denies that cognitive investigation is possible in any form.

Two chapters on religion are also disappointing. Guy Fielding and Sue Llewellyn compare "New Religions" or "cults" with modern, innovative, psychotherapy (encounter, Gestalt, and bioenergetics). Paul Heelas and Richard L. P. Smith, in their chapter, discuss the psychotherapeutic transformation. Unlike

A. David Jones

GUY CLAXTON (Editor)
Beyond Therapy: The impact of Eastern religions on psychological theory and practice
352pp. Wisdom. Paperback, £9.95.
086171 0436
ALAN KEIGHTLEY
Into Every Life a Little Zen Must Fall
194pp. Wisdom. Paperback, £6.95.
086171 0347

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, psychotherapy has been dominated by medicine and psychoanalysis. On the one hand psychiatrists applied the medical model of disease so as to diagnose mental illness in people who feel disturbed (or who appear so to others) and to treat it with medication, surgery and shock therapy. They are now assisted by psychologists, who use "behaviour modification" and other techniques derived mainly from the behaviourism of B. F. Skinner. On the other hand psychoanalysts developed a biological model of human distress, which retained catharsis and insight as a healing process.

During the century in which psychotherapy triumphed (as Philip Rieff has put it), religious methods of overcoming suffering waned. Theologians became defensive and their inquiries into the nature of God were judged, inappropriately, by the criteria of logical positivism, which lent itself to crude scientific materialism. The resurgence in the West of interest in Buddhism owes a debt to Alan Watts, to the Human Potential Movement and to the Tibetan diaspora. Buddhism's model of the mind and its methods of research are being used by some psychotherapists and some theologians to free themselves from the limitations which scientific materialism imposed on them.

Most of the contributors to the seventeen chapters of *Beyond Therapy*, edited by Guy Claxton, are academic or clinical psychologists with experience of Buddhism and its practices. Ian Wray points out that Christianity lacks two things which are central to psychology and which are contained in Buddhism: the means of investigating the subjective empirically, and a system of therapeutics leading to "skillfulness". He and other contributors observe that in the Christian tradition God is an external authority for ethical standards, even as the physical sciences are used as an objective external authority for what exists. In Buddhism authority is awareness.

The appeal of Buddhism (especially in the form of Zen) to therapists lies in its potential for deep personal change. Suffering, according to the Buddha, arises because we are vulnerable to being swamped by memories of the past and by expectations of the future. Belief and knowledge are the creation of our minds, faith is context-dependent, and thought and

Necessary delight

Flint Schier

SALIM KEMAL
Kant and Fine Art: An essay on Kant and the philosophy of fine art and culture
180pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £29.50.
019 828276

Commentators on Kant's critique of aesthetic judgment (comprising the First Part of his *Critique of Judgment*) enter treacherous terrain. There is an overwhelming urge to rearrange the geography of that sublime country to suit the taste and understanding of the commentator. Salim Kemal, in *Kant and Fine Art*, has not contented that temptation; he has indulged it to the limit. His strategy is to rummage for a problem within Kant's theory of taste, and then to test it by splicing in arguments from Kantian texts on quite different themes, without any respect for the integrity of Kant's aesthetic theory, the aim of which was, after all, precisely to distil the peculiar essence of judgments of taste. The result of Kemal's free-wheeling *bricolage* is a quite chimerical Kant.

Kant makes it clear that a judgment of taste is neither generated by, nor productive of, an interest in the existence of the beautiful object or anything else. This means that the judgment of taste is not sensitive to the actual origins of the objects it judges, and therefore cannot distinguish, for example, between fine art and natural beauty. Kant admits these distinctions, of course, but claims that they must not influence a pure judgment of taste. He thinks that judgments of taste are to be distinguished from judgments of the agreeable - of canary wine, for example - partly in virtue of the fact that the latter sort of judgment is an interested one, going birth to a desire for "more of the same". And it is because judgments of taste are disinterested that we lay claim to universal agreement with our taste - a claim we do not make when we judge the agreeable. Moreover, for Kant, to claim that "x is beautiful" is to claim that there is a *necessity* in the delight afforded by x.

Kant's master thought is that the necessity of the delight which grounds a legitimate judgment of taste can be explained by reference to Kant's thoughts about fine art. But since Kant is clear that our judgment of fine art *qua* fine

art is always interested, whereas pure judgments of taste are never interested, no such idea could have crossed Kant's mind. It is true that Kant encumbers humanity with various duties of self-development, and that he recognized the essential role of communal culture in promoting this development, but no such notions can enforce the necessity of the delight in the beautiful, for that delight must be devoid of all interest. Forgetting Nietzsche's sage admonition that "We praise or blame according to whether the one or the other offers a greater opportunity for our powers of judgment to shine out", Kemal subscribes to the bizarre notion that our appreciation of fine art is a kind of specific against social disharmony, a hope he supposes Kant to share, despite the latter's wise disavowal of it in his remarks about the arrogance of the virtuosity of taste in fine art. Of all things, it is taste in art that Kant, like Rousseau, suspects of being peculiarly prone to theatricalization and *amour propre*; and it is precisely the absence of such perversities in our estimation of the beauties of nature that encourages Kant to approve of a love of natural beauty as being the sign of a good soul. So the absurdity of Kemal's interpretation is compounded: he tries to explain the necessity of disinterested delight in terms of an interest (in, for example, self-development) and he up-ends Kant's real view of the strained relations between fine art and moral goodness.

In addition to a weakness for squaring interpretative circles, Kemal's text involves some doubtful argument. He writes approvingly that, for Kant, an "assessment of creativity" is "independent of origination" - a remarkable idea which would allow for the possibility of creative driftwood. And his reason for thinking that we ascribe creativity primarily to objects and only derivatively to agents is a real humdinger: "There is little reason beyond prejudice for describing a person as creative when not all his actions will be creative..."

Kemal's prose is bleak, the grammar occasionally slipshod and the textual references to Kant are not always spot on. Terms like "nature", "freedom" and "noumenal causality" are flung about in a rather intimidating way, and the problems of Kant's aesthetic theory are nowhere brought out with force and clarity. The uninitiated will scratch her head, the scholar will avert her gaze.

Under constraints

Lynne Cooke

GEOFF DYER
Ways of Telling: The work of John Berger
180pp. Photo. £12.95 (paperback, £4.95).
01453 00979

Geoff Dyer's claim that John Berger has been "the brightest figure in British intellectual life" over the past twenty-five years has the effect of bringing the reader up short. Intrigued, incredulous, provoked, one waits to see how the author will plead his case - but in vain. Rather than arguing closely, and with reference to British cultural life of the past quarter-century, Dyer merely surveys Berger's career, discussing in detail and chronological sequence each of his major works. Ultimately, Dyer's case seems to rest as much on the diversity of Berger's activity - as art critic, novelist, poet, filmmaker - as on the originality or profundity of his thought.

In consequence, the reader's doubts begin to multiply. For unlike, say, Raymond Williams or E. P. Thompson, Berger is neither a (first-rate) theorist nor a scholar; he is essentially a populist. And it is as a populist that he has made his greatest impact. Whereas for Dyer the fact that his subject has always remained "outside the security of the academy" is in itself a sign of virtue, this surely needs to be set against the very real limitations that result from writing for a vast but very general audience. *Ways of Seeing*, which is among Berger's most seminal books, has arguably proved most fruitful in the more detailed and in-depth studies it has stimulated in various of the areas which it addresses. G. Berger's most successful novel and winner of the Booker Prize in 1972, *One Man's War*, and, notwithstanding Dyer's

claims to the contrary, feels clumsy and strained in its structure and characterization when compared to the *nouveau roman* with which it has certain affinities. Dismissing out of hand as a point of comparison references to Sarraute, Sollers or Butor, Dyer (typically) invokes instead Benjamin, Marx, Cubism and Godard, but only the last seems truly apposite. In citing Cubism rather than Rauschenberg, Dyer once again reveals the very limited understanding of the visual arts that permeates his whole account; in citing Benjamin and Marx he introduces two giants from an intellectual tradition which Berger has wished to make his own, irrespective of their suitability to the occasion.

As Dyer points out, Berger's characteristic method entails writing in short declarative sentences, and peppering his account with polemical assertions rather than arguing in detail or by means of a process of description, analysis and deduction. Since Berger's theoretical position substantially predetermines his response to individual artists and works of art, he is rarely flexible enough in his criticism to deal persuasively with all aspects of a situation or exemplar. Thus his celebrated account of Picasso, for example, contains some perceptive insights, but finally founders because his theoretical position is too constrained and rigid to deal adequately with the shifts and convolutions in the painter's later career; a blanket dismissal ensues.

Geoff Dyer himself seems to have learnt much from his subject, and mentor, in that his vigorous writing contains similar terse assertions, bald arguments and polemical pronouncements. Whatever qualifications or reinforcements his voices are virtually drowned out in his enthusiastic exposition of Berger's case as a whole. The result is a lively introduction, but not a definitive critical study.

TLS

The Times Literary Supplement

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"This substantial and attractive book should be warmly welcomed. A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop's translation of *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology* by Pierre Grimal, originally published in French in 1951, is a work at once authoritative and complete. Anyone who has ever lost his way in the complex genealogies of the Greek gods and heroes will value the forty genealogical tables; scholars will appreciate the superbly detailed references to the ancient sources for each entry, as well as the helpful (and modernized) table of sources, in which care has been taken to list the editions which are most easily accessible for English readers (especially, and relevantly, the Loeb Classical Library), and there is a full index. . . . The black-and-white illustrations are copious and pertinent. My sampling of the entries and references found an impressive standard of accuracy; the generous cross-referencing given makes browsing an almost mandatory pleasure, and it will indeed be a learned reader who does not find something he did not previously know on almost every page.

For a long time there has been a need to replace the useful but very outdated *Classical Dictionary* of Lemprière. For factual and historical matters this was done years ago by the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*; and, with the publication of Pierre Grimal's *Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, Lemprière can finally be relegated to the shelf reserved for books which have honourably outlived their usefulness."

J. H. C. Leach TLS 8th August 1986

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John C. Leach

Sales of books and manuscripts

H. R. Woudhuysen

On April 27 and 28 Sotheby's are selling what must be the finest private collection in the world of colour-plate botanical books. The library was formed by Robert de Belder, whose arborum at Kalmthout, north of Antwerp near the Dutch border, is internationally famous. De Belder collected the books during the past thirty or so years, buying some as recently as those from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society sale in 1980. Throughout the lavish auction catalogue the emphasis is on the fine condition of the books de Belder owned and on the many association copies and annotated items. Many of the books are extremely rare and their bibliographical details are sometimes confused, with different authorities calling for different numbers of plates: the catalogue will undoubtedly become an important reference work for those interested in the history of botanical illustration and the bibliography of colour-plate books. The prices Sotheby's estimate these extremely beautiful books to fetch are, as one might expect, large. It is unlikely that such an exceptional collection could ever be put together again. Many of the books will probably appear again on the market but institutional libraries are probably unlikely to want to spend their grants on this sort of material.

In some ways the most interesting features of these books, apart from their often rather bizarre plates, are their provenances and bindings. A few English items stand out in this respect and are expected to go for prices which, in comparison with some of the more spectacular lots, seem quite modest. The most pleasing of them is a copy of Francisco Hernandez's survey of the natural history of Mexico, *Nova Plantarum*, published in Latin at Rome in 1651. This was originally owned by the gentleman collector and Master of the London Bridge waterworks, John Morris; after his

death in 1658 his widow sold his books to Charles II, who had this volume bound by Samuel Meare in red morocco, with his cipher in gilt. Charles's collection passed in 1757 with the Old Royal Library to the British Museum, which sold this book as a duplicate in 1787; it then entered the collection of Heneage Finch, fourth Earl of Aylesford, who was a pupil of Piranesi, and was sold by Sotheby's at the Arpad Plesch sale in 1975: T. A. Birrell was unable to locate it in his invaluable catalogue of Morris's library. Sotheby's expect this well-connected volume to fetch as much as £6,000. Another book with an interesting English provenance is the bibliographer Narcissus Luttrell's copy of *Paradisus in Sole Paradisus Terrestis*, 1629, by John Parkinson. This is the most famous of English gardening books of the seventeenth century "based on the contents of his own garden". Parkinson's other work, the herbal called *Theatrum Botanicum*, 1649, is present in John Evelyn's copy, bound for him in Parisian mottled calf. The two volumes are expected to go for £1,000-£1,200 and £4,000-£5,000, respectively. One other English binding from a slightly later period is worth mentioning. This is on a copy of Sir Hans Sloane's *A Voyage to the Islands*, issued in two volumes in 1707 and 1725; the first volume was bound by the successor to Meare's bindery, Robert Steel, and the second by an unidentified binder to the same pattern.

Christie's held a sale of natural history, travel and architectural colour-plate books on April 8. The sale was very successful with just over 200 lots fetching about £500,000. An almost complete set of Jane's *All the World's Fighting Ships* from 1898 until 1985, lacking only three volumes, went for £3,200 (estimate £1,500-£2,000), while an otherwise almost entirely unknown set of twelve hand-coloured plates by the artist Mornay of *Une Année de Saint-Petersbourg*, issued at Paris in 1812 and used as a source by Orme for his *A Picture of St Petersburg*, London 1815, made £20,000 against a pre-sale estimate of £7,000-£8,000.

On the next day, April 9, Bloomsbury Book Auctions had more solidly literary books for sale. The most interesting item was a Restoration manuscript poetical miscellany. Some of the poems in the volume were more or less contemporary with the date on its title-page of 1667, but it contained a surprising amount of pre-Civil War verse including poems by Sidney, Raleigh, Donne and Jonson. Bloomsbury estimated that it would fetch at most £1,200; in the event Quattrich paid £4,000 for it, a price which reflects the growing scarcity of this kind of miscellany. Burgess Browning spent £1,400, against a pre-sale estimate of £200-£300, on a letter of April 15, 1799, from Byron's mother to her relative, Mrs Duff of Fetteresso, which contains material of interest to those concerned with the true state of the poet's foot. The apparently unpublished letter was written after Dr Baillie's operation on it, and the solicitor's mother tells her friend that "It is now

almost quite well, so like his other foot, his strangers have asked which foot it was... I believe Byron as soon as ever his foot is quite well will go to a public school".

Among the printed books, an almost complete run of *The Gentleman's Magazine* from 1731 to 1851 went for £1,700 to A. K. Henderson (estimate £200-£300), and an intriguing mixed lot of twenty-one books on photography including Thomas Sutton's *The Calotype Process*, 1855, and Alfred S. Taylor's *On the Art of Photogenic Drawing*, 1840, made £200 against a higher pre-sale estimate of only £100. A small collection of Oscar Wilde's books owned by his friend Adela "Tiny" Schuster of Wimbledon did well, with the first edition of *The Happy Prince*, 1888, making £300 (estimate £60-£80) and the limited edition of 1890 of *The Importance of Being Earnest* going for £220 (estimate £100-£150). None of these prices includes the buyer's premium.

FIFTY YEARS ON

To mark the bicentenary of Edward Gibbon's birth, the TLS of April 24, 1937, carried as its leading article an appreciation of the historian by Virginia Woolf, from which the following extracts are taken:

"Yet, upon the whole, the 'History of the Decline and Fall' seems to have struck root, both at home and abroad, and may, perhaps, a hundred years hence still continue to be abused." So Gibbon wrote in the calm confidence of immortality; and let us confirm him in his own opinion of his book by showing, in the first place, that it has one quality of permanence - it still excites abuse. Few people can read the whole of the Decline and Fall without admitting that some chapters have glided away without leaving a trace; that many pages are no more than a confusion of sonorous sounds; and that innumerable figures have passed across the stage without printing even their names upon our memories. We seem, for hours on end, mounted on a celestial rocking-horse which, as it gently sways up and down, remains rooted to a single spot. . . . We suspect that the vast fame with which the great historian is surrounded is one of those vague diffusions of acquiescence which gather when people are too busy, too lazy or too timid to see things for themselves. And to justify this suspicion it is easy to gather composites of diction - the Church has become "the sacred edifice"; and sentences so stereotyped that they chime like bells - "destroyed the confidence" must be followed by "and excited the

resentment"; while characters are doubled up with single epithets like "the vicious" or "the virtuous," and are so crudely jointed that they seem capable only of the extreme antics of puppets dangling from a string. It is easy, in short, to suppose that Gibbon owed some part of his fame to the gratitude of journalists on whom he bestowed the gift of a style singularly open to imitation and well adapted to invent little ideas with large bodies. And then we turn to the book again, and to our amazement we find that the rocking-horse has left the ground, we are mounted on a winged steed; we are sweeping in wide circles through the air and below us Europe unfolds; the ages change and pass; a miracle has taken place. . . . Nothing in the first place, could have been more cautious, more deliberate and more far-sighted than Gibbon's choice of a subject. . . . But once found, how was he to treat the distant, the safe, the extensive theme? An attitude, a style had to be adopted; one presumably that generalized, since problems of character were to be avoided; that abolished the writer's personality, since he was not dealing with his own times and contemporary questions; that was rhythmical and fluent, rather than abrupt and intense, since vast stretches of time had to be covered, and the reader carried smoothly through many folios of print. . . . At last the problem was solved; the fusion was complete; matter and manner became one; we forget the style, and are only aware that we are safe in the keeping of a great artist.

AMONG THIS WEEK'S CONTRIBUTORS

- Stephen Bann's *The Clothing of Clio: A study of the representation of history in nineteenth-century British and French literature* was published in 1984.
- Lord Bonham Carter was the first Chairman of the Race Relations Board (1966-70) and then Chairman of the Community Relations Commission (1971-9).
- Brian Boyd is the author of *Nabokov's "Ada": The place of consciousness*, 1985.
- Graham Bradshaw lectures on English Literature at the University of St Andrews.
- Frances Cairncross is Britain's Editor of *The Economist*.
- Henry Chadwick is Regius Professor Emeritus of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. His *Augustine* was published last year.
- Peter Clarke is the author of *Literature and Social Democracy*, 1981.
- Lynne Cooke is a lecturer in History of Art at University College London.
- Don Cupitt is Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. His most recent book is *Life Lines*, 1986, and his *The Long Legged Fly* is due to appear later this year.
- John Dunn is a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. His *Rethinking Modern Political Theory* was published in 1985.
- Barbara Everett's *Poets in Their Time: Essays on English poetry from Donne to Larkin* appeared earlier this year.
- Christopher Hawtree's anthology of the magazine *Night and Day* was published in 1985.
- Michael Hofmann's new collection of poems, *Aerimony*, was reviewed in the TLS of March 20.
- David Howell's most recent book is *Blind Victory: A study in income, wealth and power*, 1986. He is a Conservative MP for Guildford.
- A. David Jones is a lecturer in Psychology at the London School of Economics.
- Tony Judt's *Marxism and the French Left: Studies on labour and politics in France* appeared last year.
- John Kemp's *H. G. Wells and the Culminating Age* was published in 1982.
- Rudolf Klein is Professor of Social Policy at the University of Bath. He is the co-editor of *The Future of Welfare*, 1985.
- Eric Korn is an antiquarian bookseller in London.
- Keith Poller is Senior Lecturer in Music at Goldsmiths' College, University of London.
- J. M. Richards's *Whip of Whims: Architecture from 1400 to the present day* was published in 1971.
- Plini Schler's *Deeper into Pictures* has recently been published.
- William Shawcross is the author of *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, holocaust and modern science*, 1984.
- Frances Spalding's *British Art Since 1900* was published last year.
- Jeremy Waldron lectures at the University of Edinburgh on Political Science and will shortly take up a Professorship at the University of California, Berkeley.
- Edgar Walters is Joan Paley's Professor of Modern European History at the University of California, Los Angeles. His *Peasants into Frenchmen: The modernization of rural France* was published in 1977.
- Philip Whitehead was Secretary for the Arts Council, 1970-83, and then Chairman of the Arts Council, 1983-85. He was presenter of *Creative* on London Weekend Television in 1984.

TLS Listings

A comprehensive weekly selection of new and forthcoming books received by the TLS

The TLS Listings provides full publication details of those books received each week by the TLS which seem to fall within the main interests of our readers. Children's books, foreign-language books and paperback reprints of recent works are not, however, included. Publishers are asked to ensure that they let us have all the necessary information, including price and publication date.

Anthropology

Williams, Nancy M. Two Laws: Managing disputes in contemporary Aboriginal community. *Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies*. Pp. 325. \$25.95. 0 85575 174 6. 3/87.

Archaeology

McCann, Anna Marguerite, et al. The Roman Port and History of Cosa: A center of ancient trade. *Oxford: Princeton UP*. 333pp., plates. £100.10. 0 691 0381 4.

Architecture

Burnett, Jonathan The Elusive City: Five centuries of design, ambition and misadventure. *London: Duckworth*. 212pp., illus. £14.95. 0 90069 71 9. 23/87.

Art

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